

CRS REPORT FOR CONGRESS

TELEVISION NETWORK EVENING NEWS COVERAGE OF AFGHANISTAN:
A PERSPECTIVE AFTER EIGHT YEARS OF WAR

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ABSTRACT

As a follow-up to an earlier CRS study, this report examines the coverage of the war in Afghanistan provided by the evening news programs of the ABC, CBS and NBC television networks in 1986 and 1987. In the report's five sections are discussed (1) the networks' overall Afghanistan coverage in 1986 and January-August 1987 compared with that for the prior six years of the war; (2) measures of the time and number of stories afforded to the Afghanistan conflict each month in 1986 and 1987; (3) an overview of the networks' evening news coverage of Afghanistan during the December 1987 summit meeting of President Reagan and Soviet leader Gorbachev; (4) instances in 1986 and 1987 when the networks presented stories on the evening news based on a correspondent's authorized visit to Afghanistan; and (5) the prospects for increased network coverage of Afghanistan in 1988.

NOTE

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SUMMARY

In 1986 the evening news programs of the ABC, CBS and NBC television networks devoted more air time to stories about the conflict in Afghanistan than they had in any year since 1980 (the first year of the Soviet Union's military occupation of that country). The most current monthly program data available for 1987, covering January through August, showed that the networks presented roughly the same amount of Afghanistan coverage per month as in 1986.

Twice during this period, the Afghanistan conflict received extensive coverage on all three networks, in December 1986 and January 1987. News developments in December 1986 which prompted expanded Afghanistan treatment were the call for a Soviet withdrawal by Russian dissident Andrei Sakharov and the seventh anniversary of the Russians' invasion. January 1987 was noteworthy for new diplomatic initiatives undertaken by the Soviet Union and for a rare opening of the Afghan capital of Kabul to the American broadcast media.

Transcripts obtained from the networks also revealed that Afghanistan received unusually prominent treatment on the evening newscasts of ABC, CBS and NBC during the December 1987 summit meeting of President Reagan and Soviet General Secretary Mikhail Gorbachev. During the "summit week" of December 7-11, 1987, the war in Afghanistan was a recurring topic in the evening news, with the Reagan-Gorbachev discussions concerning Afghanistan the "lead story" on all three networks on the evening of December 9, 1987.

A noteworthy development in 1986 was the relaxation by the authorities in Afghanistan of the strict policy of excluding American network personnel from the country. Periodically in 1986 and 1987 the evening news programs presented not only video material filmed in Afghanistan clandestinely but also reports from correspondents visiting Afghanistan openly with the authorization of either the Soviet Union or the Kabul government.

Several factors figured in this increased coverage:

- Important new developments in the longstanding military conflict, including the improved battlefield performances of the Afghan guerrilla resistance and Soviet initiatives to withdraw their troops.

- The policy decisions of CBS to treat the military struggle as a continuing story meriting prominent, periodic coverage on the evening news;

- The new willingness of the USSR and the Kabul government to grant visas to Western journalists for visits into Afghanistan.

Events surrounding an expected Soviet military withdrawal and an over-all peace settlement may further magnify the importance of Afghanistan as a network news story in 1988. However, as was the case during the first eight years of the war, the extent and nature of network news coverage of events in Afghanistan will be affected, among other things, by the on-the-scenes access that network personnel have in that country.

INTRODUCTION

BACKGROUND

For more than eight years military forces of the Soviet Union have fought in the mountainous central Asian nation of Afghanistan against fierce resistance from Afghan guerrillas who call themselves the Mujahideen ("warriors for the faith"). The protracted war has taken a tremendous human toll. Estimates of the number of Afghan soldiers, rebels, and civilians killed during the conflict range from at least 500,000 to more than one million.¹ Soviet casualties are estimated at 33,000-38,000, at least one third of those combat deaths.² Five million refugees, nearly one third of Afghanistan's pre-war population of 16 million, have fled their homeland to Pakistan, Iran, and other countries, making Afghans the largest group of refugees in the world, while an additional three million Afghans are believed displaced within their

¹ The more conservative estimate was supplied by a source at the Department of State when contacted recently by telephone. The higher estimate was made in a May 1987 congressional hearing concerned with human rights in Afghanistan. See U.S. Congress. House. Committee on Foreign Affairs. Subcommittee on Human Rights and International Organizations. Human Rights in Afghanistan, 1987. Hearings, 100th Congress, 1st Sess., May 21, 1987. Washington, U.S. Govt. Print. Off., 1987. p. 2-3. (Hereafter cited as Human Rights in Afghanistan)

² U.S. Department of State. Afghanistan: Eight Years of Soviet Occupation. Special Report No. 173. December 1987. p. 9. (Hereafter cited as Eight Years of Soviet Occupation) See also Human Rights in Afghanistan, p. 1-2.

country.³ Various international organizations have reported continuing evidence of widespread torture and other inhumane acts committed largely (but not exclusively) by the Soviets and the pro-Soviet Afghan government.⁴

Throughout the course of the war in Afghanistan, both the USSR and the United States have been seen as having a high stake in the conflict's eventual outcome. Following closely upon the revolution in Iran, the Soviet invasion raised the specter of a Soviet drive to the warm waters of the Persian Gulf and put Soviet tactical aircraft within theoretical combat range of the Straits of Hormuz.⁵ The invasion chilled U.S.-Soviet relations and fortified opposition in the United States to Senate ratification of the Strategic Arms Limitation Treaty (SALT II) earlier agreed on by the Soviets and President

³ Eight Years of Soviet Occupation, p. 19; Crossette, Barbara. Afghans Away From Home: Rugs, Guns and Fear. New York Times, April 10, 1987. p. A4; Human Rights in Afghanistan, p. 1-2.

⁴ See, for example, testimony and prepared statements of witnesses at congressional hearing, in Human Rights in Afghanistan, p. 10-102. See also Brumley, Bryan. Afghan Atrocities Charged to Soviets and their Cohorts. Washington Times, Nov. 19, 1987. p. A10; United Nations. General Assembly. Report of the Economic and Social Council; Report of the Independent Counsel on International Human Rights on the Human Rights Situation in Afghanistan. (Ermacora Report). A/C.3/42/8. Nov. 17, 1987. 26 p.; Tears, Blood and Cries: Human Rights in Afghanistan since the Invasion, 1979-1984. A Report from Helsinki Watch. December 1984. 212 p.

For a brief discussion of violent acts committed by the Mujahideen in 1987 which, according to a cable from the American embassy in Kabul, "might be described as excessive," see Human Rights in Afghanistan, p. 101.

⁵ See Hauner, Milan. Soviet Global Strategy and the Southern Tier. Global Affairs, v. 2, Fall 1987. p. 104-18; McCain, Morris. On Moscow's Southern Flank: Soviet Interest in Iran, Afghanistan, and Pakistan. Journal of South Asian and Middle Eastern Studies, v. 11, Fall-Winter 1987. p. 5-20; Nahaylo, Bohdan. The Repercussions of Afghanistan for Soviet Foreign Policy: A Brief Retrospective. New York, Radio Liberty Research, 1986. 5 p.; Armstrong, G.P. Afghanistan: The Soviet Strategic Dilemma. Ottawa, Department of National Defence, Directorate of Strategic Analysis, 1987. 35 p.; U.S. Library of Congress. Congressional Research Service. Afghanistan: Soviet Invasion and U.S. Response. Archived Issue Brief No. 80006, by Richard P. Cronin. Washington, March 25, 1982. p. 7.

Carter. The early years of the war seemed a dramatic and unequal contest between the Red Army, with its formidable array of armor, artillery and tactical air support, and a ragtag irregular army of poorly armed tribesmen. By 1987, however, the tide of the conflict appeared to have shifted, raising the possibility that the guerrillas, now armed and backed by the United States, Pakistan, China and the Islamic states, might succeed in defeating Soviet efforts to consolidate a Communist Afghan regime.⁶

Coverage of the war in Afghanistan and the magnitude of human suffering there has presented difficult challenges for major news organizations in the United States. On January 17, 1980, less than a month after Soviet troops had invaded Afghanistan in support of the client government in Kabul, Western journalists were ordered out of the country. During the ensuing years, reporters from the West rarely were given permission to enter Afghanistan and then only on visits tightly supervised by the government. On-the-scene reporting of the Afghanistan conflict came for the most part from a small number of correspondents operating in Afghanistan clandestinely to avoid

⁶ In his January 25, 1988 State of the Union message to Congress. President Reagan declared: "We support the Mujahidin. There can be no settlement unless all Soviet troops are removed and the Afghan people are allowed genuine self-determination. I have made my views on this matter known to Mr. [Soviet leader Mikhail] Gorbachev." Text of Reagan's Address to Nation on the State of the Union. New York Times, Jan., 26, 1988. p. A16.

For discussion of the strategic implications of the outcome in Afghanistan to the United States, see U.S. Library of Congress. Congressional Research Service. The United States, Pakistan, and the Soviet Threat to Southern Asia. Report No. 85-152 F, by Richard P. Cronin. Washington, September 1985. 45 p.; Leitenberg, Milton. United States Foreign Policy and the Soviet Invasion of Afghanistan. Arms Control, v. 7, December 1986. p. 271-98; Rashid, Ahmed. Pakistan, Afghanistan and the Gulf. MCRIP Reports, v. 17, September-October 1987. p. 35-37, 39.

For discussion of the Soviet Union's increasing military difficulties in Afghanistan, see: Ottaway, David B. U.S. Missiles Alter War in Afghanistan. Washington Post, July 10, 1987. p. A1, A16.

capture.⁷ Illegal entry to report the war while accompanying Afghan guerrillas put the lives of journalists at constant risk. In an October 1984 interview with two French journalists, the Soviet ambassador to Pakistan warned that Western journalists accompanying the Mujahideen would be killed and that Soviet military units "will help the Afghan forces" to do it.⁸ Subsequently, in September 1985, newspaper correspondent Charles Thornton of the Arizona Republic became the first American journalist to die in the Afghanistan conflict.⁹

In the United States, meanwhile, U.S.-based news organizations drew criticisms from some observers for allegedly ignoring almost completely the ongoing story of the war in Afghanistan.¹⁰ Some suggested that the difficulty

⁷ Dameyer, Christina. Covering Afghanistan: A Reporter's Notebook. Columbia Journalism Review, v. 23, September/October 1984. p. 43-46 (Hereafter cited as Dameyer, Covering Afghanistan); Girardet, Edward. Soviets Step Up War Against Reporters in Afghanistan. Christian Science Monitor, Oct. 23, 1984. p. 1, 16.

⁸ Specifically, the Soviet ambassador, Vitaly S. Smirnov, was reported to have told the journalists: "I warn you, and through you, all of your journalist colleagues: stop trying to penetrate Afghanistan with the so-called guerrillas. From now on, the bandits, and so-called journalists accompanying them will be killed. Our units in Afghanistan will help the Afghan forces" to do it. Vinocur, John. France Accuses Soviet on Afghan Reporting. New York Times, Oct. 16, 1984. p. A6.

⁹ Thornton, according to a photographer accompanying him (who escaped safely to Pakistan), died when 40 Soviet helicopter-landed troops fired on their Jeep as they were making their way out of Afghanistan. The two journalists were said to have entered Afghanistan to report on the relief work there of a volunteer medical team. Killed in the Line of Duty. Washington Journalism Review, v. 7, December 1985. p. 9. See also Associated Press dispatch. Afghan Rebels Report U.S. Death. New York Times, Oct. 1, 1985. p. A11.

¹⁰ See for example, Damayer, Covering Afghanistan, p. 46; Hughes, John. Afghanistan. Christian Science Monitor, Feb. 3, 1986. p. 12; Kirp, David L. Banning Cameras. Christian Science Monitor, Nov. 13, 1985. p. 18.

See also the June 1985 testimony of Ben Wattenberg, vice chairman of the Board for International Broadcasting, at a congressional hearing. Mr. Wattenberg maintained that if the networks provided the American viewers with more than sporadic news coverage of tragedies occurring in Afghanistan, there would be a "proper degree of outrage and disgust" and greater pressure brought to bear on the Soviets "to end this genocide." In U.S. Congress. Congressional Task Force on Afghanistan. Hearing on Effective Public Diplomacy. June 17, 1985. Transcript. p. 32, 33.

and danger in reporting from Afghanistan itself was no excuse for news media indifference to the conflict there. ¹¹

In June 1985, hearings by the Congressional Task Force on Afghanistan, a bi-partisan House-Senate group chaired by Sen. Gordon J. Humphrey, R-N.H., focused on ways in which international opinion might be brought more effectively to bear on the Soviets in Afghanistan. One proposal considered at the hearing was that the United States fund a program of providing video cameras to the Mujahideen as a means of promoting on-going film coverage of the Afghan war for dissemination to news organizations outside Afghanistan. ¹² To this end, Congress in August 1985 passed an amendment to a supplemental appropriations bill in which \$500,000 was set aside "to promote the development of an independent media service by the Afghan people and to provide for the training of Afghans in media and media-related fields." ¹³

Against this backdrop, the Congressional Research Service in 1986 undertook to provide a precise measure of the actual extent to which the three

¹¹ Hughes, Afghanistan, p. 12; Wattenberg, Congressional Task Force on Afghanistan, p. 32. (See preceding footnote for full citations.)

¹² U.S. Congress. Congressional Task Force on Afghanistan. Hearing on Effective Public Diplomacy. June 17, 1985. Senator Humphrey drew attention to a suggestion that "we should be involved in a program of providing mini-cams [small video cameras] to the Freedom Fighters so that they can bring out footage which then the media can . . . edit and try to corroborate by various means." This, Senator Humphrey continued, "isn't as ideal as they or we might like, but is a giant step beyond what we are doing." Hearing transcript, p. 57.

Strongly concurring was one witness, who commented that "the most important thing is to have the Afghans do it themselves and have them organizing their own information effort to get cameras, to get qualified people to act as translators, guides, interpreters, centers of information that could provide reliable information, cross-checking of stories, and so forth." Remarks of Ralph Magnus, Associate Professor, Department of National Security Affairs, Naval Postgraduate School. Hearing transcript. p. 67.

¹³ Public Law 99-88, 99 Stat. 309.

major television networks in the United States had covered the war in Afghanistan during the conflict's first six years. Subsequently, CRS issued a report which examined the nature and extent of Afghanistan news presented on the regular evening news programs of the ABC, CBS and NBC television networks, from 1980 through 1985.¹⁴ The CRS report found that in amount of evening news air time devoted to stories focusing on Afghanistan, 1980 far surpassed each of the years that followed. In 1980 an average of 204.7 minutes per network were devoted to Afghanistan--17.1 minutes per network monthly. At a much lower level was the amount of three-network coverage of Afghanistan from 1981 to 1985. During these years the most Afghanistan coverage came in 1984, when an average of 28.2 minutes per network was afforded to Afghanistan developments--a monthly average of 2.4 minutes on each network.¹⁵

News executives for the television networks, who were contacted by CRS during the report's preparation, defended as appropriate the over-all extent of network coverage given to Afghanistan over the years. Each network news organization reported that it would have preferred affording greater coverage to Afghanistan developments but was seriously handicapped in doing so by a lack of reliable information from Afghanistan--a problem attributed to an inability to report from the scene.¹⁶

The CRS report identified a variety of factors which appeared to have influenced the extent of the television networks' Afghanistan coverage. Factors specifically noted were the networks' restricted access to

¹⁴ U.S. Library of Congress. Congressional Research Service. Television Network Evening News Coverage of the Afghanistan Conflict: The First Six Years. Special Report, by Denis Steven Rutkus, May 29, 1986. 65 p.

¹⁵ Ibid., p. 9, 10. The year of least Afghanistan coverage was 1982. That year's three-network average was 17.1 minutes of Afghanistan coverage--1.4 minutes of coverage per network monthly.

¹⁶ Ibid., p. 4-5.

Afghanistan, the diminishing news value of the Afghanistan conflict with the passage of months and years, the competition from other stories for the limited amount of program air time available, network preferences for stories with film material, and seasonal changes in Afghanistan's weather. ¹⁷

In retrospect, one of the five factors mentioned above--the diminishing newsworthiness of the Afghanistan conflict with the passage of months and years--may be seen as having probably been especially influential. Network coverage, the CRS report showed, dropped from remarkably high levels in January and February 1980, at the beginning of the Soviets' occupation, to usually negligible amounts in the months and years that followed. As the struggle in Afghanistan became one of military stalemate, with no end in sight, ¹⁸ developments there from week to week and month to month took on a certain sameness to faraway news organizations barred from the scene; hence, after a few initial months of extensive news coverage, it is perhaps not surprising that network interest in a remote central Asian conflict would wane.

Subsequent to the 1980-85 time period examined in the CRS report, important developments in the Soviet-Afghan conflict put the longstanding news story of military stalemate in Afghanistan in a new light. Notable were these developments in particular:

-- The disclosure in March 1986 that the United States would begin supplying shoulder-held surface-to-air Stinger missiles to the Mujahideen to

¹⁷ Ibid., p. 38-43.

¹⁸ See for example Weaver, Mary Ann. Afghanistan Standoff: Soviets, Mujahideen Settle in for Winter. Christian Science Monitor. Nov. 10, 1983. p. 16; Wiznitzer, Louis. UN Tackles Afghanistan Stalemate Again, But with Little Optimism. Christian Science Monitor, April 5, 1984. p. 12.

use against Soviet helicopter gunships and fighter planes (followed in October 1986 by the first shipment of Stingers to the guerrillas); ¹⁹

-- Heightened Soviet diplomatic activity purporting to seek a negotiated settlement of the conflict and the withdrawal of Soviet forces from Afghanistan; ²⁰

-- Increasing military difficulties for USSR and Afghan government forces in their engagements with the Mujahideen, underscored by the almost daily loss of aircraft downed by Stinger missiles; ²¹

-- The December 1987 summit meeting in Washington between President Reagan and Soviet General Secretary Mikhail Gorbachev, at which the war in Afghanistan was a major agenda item. ²²

Another new development in 1986, of particular interest to Western news organizations, was the relaxation by the Soviet Union and Democratic Republic of Afghanistan of their strict policy of refusing Western news correspondents visas to make authorized visits to Afghanistan. For the first time since 1980,

¹⁹ Ottaway, David B., and Patrick E. Tyler. U.S. Sends New Arms to Rebels. Washington Post, March 30, 1986. p.A1, A16; Weintraub, Richard M. Afghans Use U.S. Missiles: Stingers Providing Antiaircraft Defense. Washington Post, Jan. 27, 1987. p.A1, A13.

²⁰ See for example Oberdorfer, Don. Kabul Offers Timetable for Soviet Pullout, but Pakistan Rejects It. Washington Post, April 2, 1986. p. A16; Gwertzman, Bernard. Afghanistan To Observe Cease-Fire. New York Times, Jan. 2, 1987. p. A10; Bohlen, Celestine. Shevardnadze, in Kabul, Says Accord Is "Close." Washington Post, Jan. 7, 1987. p. A18; Keller, Bill. Moscow Hints at Afghanistan Troop Cut. New York Times, Jan. 8, 1987. p. A3; Taubman, Philip. Kremlin Feels Strain of Afghan War. New York Times, Jan. 11, 1987. Sec. 4, p. 3.

²¹ See Weintraub, Richard M., and David B. Ottaway. Afghan Rebels Said To Hit Foe Hard. Washington Post, July 6, 1987. p. A1, A4; Ottaway, David B. U.S. Missiles Alter War in Afghanistan. Washington Post, July 19, 1987. p. A1, A16.

²² See Cannon, Louis, and Don Oberdorfer. U.S. To Prod Soviets on Afghanistan. Washington Post, Dec. 1, 1987. p. A1, A18; Oberdorfer, Don, and Lou Cannon. No Breakthrough on Afghan Pullout. Washington Post, Dec. 10, 1987. p.A1, A30; Apple, R.W., Jr. 2 Leaders Discuss Long-Range Arms and Afghan War. New York Times, Dec. 10, 1987. p. A1, A18.

ABC, CBS and NBC were afforded opportunities to visit Soviet-controlled parts of Afghanistan, although only in carefully supervised tours. ²³

By 1987, news media organizations outside Afghanistan were also finding available to them film footage taken by newly trained Mujahideen cameramen showing the war from the guerrillas' vantage point. Pursuant to Congress's approval in 1985 of funding for the project, Boston University under contract with the U.S. Information Agency sent specialists to Peshawar, Pakistan in 1987 to train Afghan refugees in videotaping techniques and other journalistic skills. ²⁴ By January 1988, 70 missions into Afghanistan by Afghan guerrilla cameramen were said to have resulted in more than 200 hours of film and 6,000 photographs and slides; news material generated by the U.S.-financed project reportedly was being distributed worldwide by European-based news services and being used by news media in more than 120 nations, many of them in the Third World. ²⁵ The American television networks, however, had made almost no use of Mujahideen-supplied film material. ²⁶

²³ The first such opportunity identified by CRS came in mid-January 1986, when NBC correspondent Steve Hurst and a network camera crew, as part of a larger group of journalists, flew to Afghanistan under the auspices of the Afghan government. In the group as well was Stuart Loory, the Moscow bureau chief of Cable News Network (CNN), accompanied by a CNN camera crew. Into the Fray. Broadcasting, v. 110, Jan. 27, 1986. p. 10.

²⁴ See Jones, Alex S. U.S. Will Help Train Afghan Refugees as Journalists. New York Times, Aug. 18, 1986. p. A13; Bernstein, Richard. For Journalism Dean, Questions About Objectivity. New York Times, Nov. 3, 1987. p. A14; Associated Press dispatch. Boston U. To Halt Afghan News Project. Washington Times, Nov. 23, 1987. p. A7.

²⁵ Tempest, Rone. Afghanistan War Pictures Under Attack, Jan. 13, 1988. Part 6, p. 8; Maitre, H. Joachim. Dean, College of Communication. Boston University. Telephone interview. Feb. 3, 1988.

²⁶ But see Tempest, Rone. Afghanistan War Pictures Under Attack. Los Angeles Times, Jan. 13, 1988. Sec. 6, p. 1 and 8, regarding CBS's inadvertent use in August 1987 of Afghanistan scenes filmed by a Mujahideen cameraman. For (continued...)

Meanwhile, perils remained for Western journalists illegally entering Afghanistan to report the conflict from the vantage point of the guerrillas. On October 11, 1987, two Americans filming a documentary in Afghanistan were killed when Soviet and Afghan forces ambushed them and their Mujahideen guides.²⁷ Also in October 1987, a British television cameraman was killed in a remote area of northeast Afghanistan.²⁸ Their deaths brought to at least six the number of foreign journalists killed since Soviet troops entered Afghanistan in December 1979.²⁹ Shortly afterwards, in early December 1987 an Italian

²⁶ (...continued)

a fuller discussion of that episode, and of CBS policy regarding use of Mujahideen-supplied film footage, see footnote 54 of this report.

In the United States, two journalistic controversies had arisen over the Afghan training program. First, there was debate at Boston University over whether its College of Communication project with the Afghan Mujahideen was more propagandistic than journalistic in nature. See Associated Press dispatch. Faculty Protests Plan To Teach Afghan Rebels. Washington Times, Aug. 22, 1986. p. A5; Bernstein, Richard. For Journalism Dean, Questions About Objectivity. New York Times, Nov. 3, 1987. p. A14. Also, questions later were raised about the propriety of American news organizations using film material originating in a media program sponsored by the U.S. Government. See Tempest article, cited at start of this note.

Distinct from these journalistic issues is the legal question of whether dissemination in the United States of Afghan-produced film would be proscribed by a longstanding statute barring the U.S. Information Agency from distributing its film products in the United States. A source at USIA's Office of Congressional Relations contacted by CRS said that agency regarded filming prepared by Afghan guerrillas not as a USIA product proscribed from dissemination in the United States, but rather as a Mujahideen product that was only indirectly the result of USIA-sponsored training.

²⁷ The two were Lee Shapiro of New Jersey-based Shapiro Media Productions and cameraman Jim Lindelof. Associated Press dispatch. Americans Die Filming Afghans. Washington Times, Oct. 28, 1987. p. A8.

²⁸ The journalist, Andrew Skrzyzkowiak, who had worked for the British Broadcasting Corporation, was according to one account "apparently a victim of a vendetta being waged by an extremist Afghan rebel faction against a popular military commander of the anti-communist mujahideen." Mackenzie, Richard. Afghan Feud Cited in Briton's Death. Washington Times, Dec. 31, 1987. p. A8.

²⁹ The six journalists identified as having died while covering the war in Afghanistan were Stale Gounthus of Norway (June 1982), Raphael Favero of Australia (October 1983), Charles Thornton of the United States (September 1985), Lee Shapiro and Jim Lindelof of the United States (October 1987) and Andrew Skrzyzkowiak of Great Britain (October 1987).

journalist was captured by Communist troops in a remote region and jailed pending a criminal investigation.³⁰ On January 4, 1988, the Afghan government's revolutionary court convicted a French journalist of spying and sentenced him to 10 years in prison.³¹ "Western journalists," a recent account noted, "have always been described by Kabul authorities as spies and are actively sought by Soviet-Afghan troops, who offer rewards for their capture and launch manhunts whenever an agent of KHAD, the Afghan secret police, reports a sighting."³²

PURPOSE AND SCOPE OF THIS REPORT

The following report looks anew at the television networks' regular evening news coverage of the war in Afghanistan, concentrating this time on coverage during the years 1986 and 1987. For these years, it examines and measures the stories in the networks' weekday and weekend evening news programs which discussed Afghanistan developments.

At the outset, the limited scope of this report should be clearly underscored: The report examines the Afghanistan news coverage of three

³⁰ The writer, Fausto Biloslavo, of the Albatross Press Agency in Trieste, Italy, was believed to have been taken to a secret police jail in Kabul. Mackenzie, Richard. Italian Reporter Seized in Remote Afghanistan. Washington Times, Dec. 7, 1987. p. A1, A10.

³¹ Filmmaker Alain Guillo, whose works had been distributed by Sygma-Television of Paris, was captured on September 12, 1987, after entering Afghanistan with guerrillas of the Afghan National Front. Associated Press dispatch. Afghans Give Reporter a 10-Year Sentence. Washington Times, Jan. 5, 1988. p. A9.

³² Mackenzie, Richard. Ambush, Death Stalk Journalists. Washington Times, Jan. 25, 1988. p. B9.

television network programs only--ABC World News Tonight, CBS Evening News, and NBC Nightly News. It does not account for any other Afghanistan coverage provided by the networks in special news broadcasts, in news magazine or other documentary programs, or in morning or late night network newscasts.³³ Nor does it examine the news programs of other television networks such as Cable News Network and the Public Broadcasting Service.

The report is based in large part on program log information contained in Television News Index and Abstracts published monthly by Vanderbilt University's Television News Archive in Nashville, Tennessee. From Vanderbilt program records, CRS research identified news segments which discussed Afghanistan, the amount of air time given each segment, the network presenting the segment, and the date of broadcast. Also noted for each segment was whether the Afghanistan conflict was the central news element (if so, it was classified as Afghanistan "focus story" material) or was merely mentioned in connection with other news. The set of all Afghanistan stories discovered through the Television News Index and Abstracts, and the sub-set of Afghanistan "focus stories," were then analyzed. Available to CRS for this research were monthly volumes of the Vanderbilt abstracts for all of 1986 and the first eight months of 1987. (Volumes covering the months September through December 1987 had not yet been published.) The first two sections of the following report

³³ Outside the scope of this report, for example, was the one-hour "CBS Reports" documentary, entitled "The Battle for Afghanistan," which was broadcast on July 29, 1987. Also not measured in this report was the air time in any late-night programs such as ABC News' "Nightline," which on December 9, 1987 was devoted to the topic, "Russia and the War in Afghanistan." Likewise, the report does not attempt to account for instances of extended discussion of the Afghanistan conflict in special news broadcasts, such as in the interview by NBC anchorman Tom Brokaw of Soviet leader Gorbachev broadcast on November 30, 1987.

are based on analysis of Vanderbilt abstracts covering the period January 1986 through August 1987.

In the report's first section, the networks' over-all amount of Afghanistan coverage in 1986 and in January-August 1987 is measured and compared with that for the prior six years of the war. Annual coverage is measured by four different standards: (1) amount of air time, in minutes and seconds, devoted to stories focusing on the Afghanistan conflict; (2) number of stories focusing on the Afghanistan conflict; (3) average length, in minutes and seconds, of stories which focused on the Afghanistan conflict; and (4) number of stories mentioning Afghanistan.

The second section examines the networks' coverage more closely, measuring the time and number of stories afforded to the Afghanistan conflict each month. We see here in precisely which months of 1986 and 1987 the networks provided the greatest and least amounts of Afghanistan coverage. The section identifies specific news events which received extensive coverage on all three networks as well as the subject matter of news reports on Afghanistan presented exclusively by one network.

A third section provides a descriptive overview of the networks' evening news coverage of Afghanistan during the December 1987 summit meeting of President Reagan and Soviet leader Mikhail Gorbachev. For this overview, CRS obtained from the three networks complete verbatim transcripts of their evening news programs for "summit week" (December 7-11, 1987).

Examined in a fourth section are instances in which the networks in 1986 and 1987 presented stories on the evening news based on a network reporter's authorized visit to Afghanistan. CRS used the Vanderbilt abstracts to identify such stories broadcast between January 1980 and August 1987 and learned of others broadcast in the period September through December 1987 by contacting the networks themselves.

others broadcast in the period September through December 1987 by contacting the networks themselves.

A final section considers the prospects for increased network coverage of Afghanistan in the near future.

THE EXTENT OF COVERAGE IN 1986 AND 1987

AMOUNT OF AIR TIME DEVOTED TO AFGHANISTAN "FOCUS STORIES"

The amount of television evening news air time which the three major networks (ABC, CBS, and NBC) devoted to stories focusing on the Afghan conflict in 1986 rose to a level exceeded only by that of 1980. Data for the first eight months of 1987 showed that the three networks during that period presented roughly the same amount of Afghanistan coverage per month as they had in 1986. The increase in total Afghanistan coverage by the networks in 1986 and 1987 primarily reflected a significantly augmented coverage by CBS over that of previous years.

The Networks as a Group

During 1986, an average of 34.6 minutes per network was devoted to Afghanistan "focus" stories--2.9 minutes per network monthly. Although quite small in comparison with the average amount of Afghanistan "focus" coverage by the networks in 1980 (204.7 minutes, or 17.1 minutes per network monthly), the 1986 three-network average constitutes roughly twice as much coverage as that provided in 1985 (17.4 minutes, or 1.5 minutes per network monthly) and surpasses the average coverage for the networks for every year except 1980. ³⁴

³⁴ The precise amounts of total air time afforded to Afghanistan "focus stories" by the three networks collectively for each year from 1980 through 1987 are indicated and illustrated in graph 1 of appendix B.

Afghanistan "focus" coverage by the three networks as a group during the first eight months of 1987 (the only months of 1987 for which program-measurement data were available), remained at approximately the same level as 1986; from January through August 1987, a monthly average of 2.75 minutes of air time was devoted to Afghanistan coverage per network (compared with 2.9 minutes per network monthly in 1986). ³⁵ It seems quite likely that any eventual calculation based on all 12 months of 1987--by including the networks' extensive treatment of the Afghanistan issue during the Reagan-Gorbachev summit in December 1987--will reveal a total amount of Afghanistan "focus" coverage exceeding that for 1986. ³⁶

Individual Networks

As it had during each of the previous six years, ³⁷ CBS Evening News in 1986 and in January-August 1987 led the other networks' in amount of evening news air time devoted to Afghanistan. The 55.2 minutes of Afghanistan "focus" coverage presented in 1986 (an average of 4.6 minutes per month) was the

³⁵ Based on data for the first eight months, the projected average for the entire year of 1987 would be 33.0 minutes of Afghanistan coverage. This average is calculated in the following way: First, by dividing the networks' total coverage for the first eight months of 1987--3,960 seconds--by 8 to compute a monthly average; then multiplying that average by 12, to compute a yearly average; then dividing by 3, to compute an annual three-network average; finally, dividing by 60, to convert the annual average for the networks from seconds into minutes.

³⁶ See the third section of this report, which provides a descriptive overview of the network's Afghanistan coverage during the December 1987 summit meeting.

³⁷ For purposes of comparison, the annual totals for seconds of Afghanistan "focus" coverage for each of the networks during the years 1980-87 are illustrated in graph 2 of Appendix B. (For precise numbers of seconds of coverage for a particular year, see table 1 in Appendix C.)

highest annual total by a network since 1980 (when each of the three networks afforded at least 200 minutes to news focusing on the Afghanistan conflict). The amount of Afghanistan coverage by ABC and NBC was well below that of CBS. In 1986 ABC World News Tonight presented 19.7 minutes of news focusing on Afghanistan (1.6 minutes monthly average), while the annual total of NBC Nightly News was 28.8 minutes (2.4 minutes monthly average).

For the period January-August 1987 the average rate at which CBS presented Afghanistan "focus" coverage increased further--to 5.1 minutes of such coverage per month. Meanwhile, ABC and NBC respectively presented an average of 2.2 minutes and 1.0 minutes of news about the Afghanistan conflict each month.

NUMBER OF AFGHANISTAN "FOCUS STORIES"

The Networks as a Group

As more minutes of air time were devoted to Afghanistan "focus" coverage in 1986 than during any of the previous five years, so also were the number of Afghanistan "focus stories" by the three networks greater in 1986. Altogether ABC, CBS and NBC presented 52 focus stories in 1986. This constituted for each network a yearly average of 17.3 "focus stories" per year, or 1.4 "focus stories" per month. In only one year in the preceding five-year period had the networks broadcast more than 40 stories focusing on Afghanistan. (This was in 1981, when the networks as a group carried 48 Afghanistan "focus stories.") Nevertheless, while the 52 "focus stories" represents a six-year peak, this figure is still quite small measured against the 281 stories which the three

networks altogether devoted to Afghanistan in 1980, the first year of the Soviet-Afghan conflict.³⁸

During the first eight months of 1987 the networks as a group presented 44 stories focusing on the war in Afghanistan, an average for each network of 1.8 Afghanistan "focus stories" per month.³⁹

Individual Networks

Both in 1986 and in the first eight months of 1987, CBS led the other two networks in number of stories focusing on the war in Afghanistan. The 25 such stories presented on CBS Evening News in 1986 were the largest annual total for a network evening news program since 1980 (when ABC, CBS and NBC respectively carried 103, 82 and 86 Afghanistan "focus stories").⁴⁰ The coverage by CBS made 1986 the first calendar year since 1980 in which a network evening news program averaged more than two Afghanistan "focus stories" per month.⁴¹

Presentation of Afghanistan news coverage occurred at a more frequent pace on CBS during the first eight months of 1987. Through August, the network had presented 23 stories focusing on the Afghanistan conflict--an average of 2.9

³⁸ The precise number of Afghanistan "focus stories" broadcast by the networks as a group for each of the eight years is indicated and illustrated in graph 3 of appendix B.

³⁹ This average was computed by dividing the number of focus stories (44) by the number of networks (3), then dividing that result by the number of months (8).

⁴⁰ During 1986 ABC and NBC respectively included 10 and 17 Afghanistan "focus stories" on the evening news.

⁴¹ To the nearest decimal point, CBS's average was 2.1 "focus stories" per month.

stories monthly. The comparable totals for NBC and ABC were 7 and 14 respectively.⁴²

AVERAGE LENGTH OF AFGHANISTAN "FOCUS STORIES"

The Networks as a Group

Between January 1980 and August 1987, the three-network average length of stories devoted to Afghanistan was slightly less than two minutes (119.1 seconds).⁴³ The networks' eight-year average was almost identical to their average story length in 1986--119.5 seconds. The three-network average for Afghanistan stories presented during the first eight months of 1987, however, dropped 30 seconds in length, to one and a half minutes (90.0 seconds).⁴⁴

Individual Networks

CBS tended, both in 1986 and in the period January-August 1987, to present longer stories focusing on the Afghanistan conflict than ABC or NBC. In 1986 the average length of an Afghanistan "focus story" on CBS was 132.4

⁴² See graph 4, appendix B, for a graphic illustration of the annual number of "focus stories" broadcast by individual networks during the years 1980-87. For precise numbers of "focus stories" for a particular network in a given year, see table 2 in appendix C.

⁴³ This was computed by dividing the combined total seconds of Afghanistan "focus coverage" presented by the three networks during the eight years (65,740 total seconds) by the number of "focus stories" which the three networks broadcast (552).

⁴⁴ The networks' group average story length for each of the eight years is indicated and illustrated graphically in graph 5, appendix B. These averages were computed by dividing the total seconds of group "focus" coverage for each year by the total number of "focus stories" presented altogether by the three networks in that year.

seconds, compared with average story lengths of 118.0 seconds on ABC and 101.8 seconds on NBC. In the first eight months of 1987, the average Afghanistan story length on each network was lower than it had been the previous year. CBS's average was 106.1 seconds, followed by average story lengths on ABC and NBC of 75.0 and 67.1 seconds respectively. ⁴⁵

STORIES MENTIONING AFGHANISTAN

Statistics for Afghanistan "mention stories" represent the total number of stories which explicitly mentioned Afghanistan in some way. Such stories included (1) Afghanistan "focus stories," in which the conflict in Afghanistan was a central focus, and (2) any other stories which mentioned Afghanistan without having the conflict there as a central focus. ⁴⁶

The Networks as a Group

Although, it may be recalled, the evening news programs of the three networks in 1986 broadcast a relatively high number of Afghanistan "focus stories," ⁴⁷ the number of Afghanistan "mention stories" presented in 1986 was

⁴⁵ These averages were computed by dividing a given network's total seconds of "focus" coverage for either 1986 or January-August 1987 (listed in table 1 of appendix C) by the total number of "focus stories" broadcast by the network in either 1986 or January-August 1987 (indicated in table 2 of appendix C).

⁴⁶ It should be noted that this number might undercount to a small degree the actual number of stories in which Afghanistan was explicitly mentioned, as counting was based on identifications from the Vanderbilt abstracts rather than from complete verbatim texts of the news programs.

⁴⁷ See earlier discussion regarding the number of "focus stories" by the networks as a group, in which it was noted that the three networks had broadcast more Afghanistan "focus stories" in 1986 than they had in any of the preceding five years.

not correspondingly high relative to other years. The 70 stories mentioning the conflict in Afghanistan in 1986 exceeded the Afghanistan "mention" totals of the networks in 1982, 1983, and 1984. The "mention" total for 1986, however, was less in number than the 72 "mention" stories carried in 1985 and was far short of the 140 such stories broadcast in 1981. During the period of January-August 1987, the network evening news programs broadcast 55 stories mentioning Afghanistan. ⁴⁸

The totals for Afghanistan "mention stories" take on more meaning when viewed in conjunction with totals for Afghanistan "focus stories." In each year from 1980 to 1985, the proportion of stories mentioning Afghanistan which were "focus stories" ranged from a low of 34.3 per cent in 1981 to a high of 59.3 per cent in 1983. ⁴⁹

Since January of 1986, however, Afghanistan "focus stories" have comprised a much higher portion of stories mentioning Afghanistan. In 1986, 52 of the 70 network stories which mentioned Afghanistan (or 74.3 per cent) were "focus stories," while 44 of the 55 stories mentioning Afghanistan during the first eight months of 1987 (or 80.0 per cent) were "focus stories." Collectively, when treating the topic of Afghanistan, the networks were more inclined in 1986 and during the first eight months of 1987 to present Afghanistan as the central focus of a news story than they had been in the preceding six years. Conversely, they were less inclined to refer to the Afghanistan conflict in the

⁴⁸ Graph 7 in appendix B lists and illustrates for the three networks as a group the total number of stories mentioning Afghanistan which were broadcast each year in the 1980-87 period.

⁴⁹ In 1981, 48 of the 140 Afghanistan "mention stories" (or 34.3 per cent) were "focus stories" as well. In 1983, 32 of the 54 Afghanistrian "mention stories" (or 59.3 per cent) were also "focus stories."

context of some other story in the news than they had been in the preceding six years.

Individual Networks

CBS led ABC and NBC in number of stories mentioning Afghanistan both in 1986 and in the period of January-August 1987. Thirty CBS stories mentioned Afghanistan in 1986, compared with 16 such stories by ABC and 24 by NBC.⁵⁰ Twenty-four stories on CBS mentioned the Afghan conflict in the first eight months of 1987, compared with 20 stories by ABC and 11 by NBC.

⁵⁰ See graph 8 of appendix B for a graphic comparison of the annual number of stories mentioning Afghanistan broadcast by the individual networks during the years 1980-87. See table 3, appendix C for the precise numbers.

A CLOSER EXAMINATION OF MONTHLY COVERAGE PATTERNS

MONTHS OF HIGHEST COVERAGE BY NETWORKS AS A GROUPDecember 1986

December 1986 is distinctive for the extensive coverage afforded to Afghanistan by all three networks: 13.0 minutes (780 seconds) by ABC, 13.2 minutes (790 seconds) by CBS, and 6.2 minutes (370 seconds) by NBC. In the prior 11 months, there was only one month, October, in which as much as three minutes of news reportage focusing on the Afghanistan situation was presented by more than one network.⁵¹

The major news development which prompted all three networks to focus at some length on Afghanistan in December was the call for a Soviet withdrawal by Russian dissident Andrei Sakharov. On December 23, as Mr. Sakharov arrived in Moscow following years of internal exile in Gorky, ABC and NBC respectively broadcast 170 and 160-second reports on his criticism of USSR policy in Afghanistan and the remarks of a Soviet ambassador denying that Mr. Sakharov would be punished for his remarks. CBS followed the next day with a similar report on the Sakharov statements lasting two minutes.

A second focal point for extended Afghanistan coverage in December was the seventh anniversary of the Russians' invasion. ABC marked the anniversary

⁵¹ CBS and NBC in October 1986 presented 740 seconds and 350 seconds of Afghanistan "focus story" coverage respectively.

with a two-part report (490 seconds total) on December 24 and 25 updating the status of the guerrillas' military resistance to the Soviet occupation. CBS in turn presented two major Afghanistan stories coinciding with the invasion anniversary--the first a December 26 status report on the Afghanistan war (230 seconds), and the second a December 27 lead story that examined indications of changing Soviet policy toward Afghanistan and the condition of Afghan refugees in Pakistan (260 seconds). These were followed on December 30 by an NBC videotaped report on the experience of a California housewife among the Mujahideen (210 seconds).

January 1987

All three networks also provided relatively extensive coverage of the Afghanistan conflict in January 1987. To the networks the month was noteworthy for new initiatives undertaken by the Soviet Union and for a rare opening of the Afghan capital of Kabul to the American broadcast media. Early in January Soviet foreign minister Eduard Shevardnadze flew to Kabul to meet with Afghan Communist leaders amid speculation that the USSR would announce the withdrawal of some troops from Afghanistan. In mid-January, the Soviets announced and then proceeded with a unilateral cease-fire, allowing American network correspondents into Afghanistan to witness the event.

ABC provided by far the most coverage in January 1987--14.5 minutes (870 seconds), compared with 5.7 minutes (340 seconds) and 4.2 minutes (250 seconds) of Afghanistan reporting respectively by CBS and NBC. ABC's reporting of Afghanistan developments began with a brief (20 seconds) story on January 6 of foreign minister Shevardnadze's visit to Kabul and a 200-second analysis the following day of his remarks concerning a possible Soviet troop withdrawal.

Afghanistan news reporting resumed on January 14. During the next week, ABC presented six stories (650 seconds total) in which its own correspondent reported on-the-scene from Kabul on the atmosphere surrounding the Soviets' unilateral cease-fire and the implications of the cease-fire for the USSR's occupation there. The extent of ABC's Afghanistan "focus" coverage during January 1987 was the most by a network for a single month since April 1983, when CBS devoted 19.1 minutes (1,150 seconds) of broadcast time to the Afghanistan conflict. ⁵²

NBC mirrored ABC's stories, but committed less time to them. On January 7 NBC reported on Mr. Shevardnadze's meeting in Kabul and the USSR's difficulties in Afghanistan (130 seconds). In a January 15 story, an NBC correspondent reporting from Kabul described the start of the Soviets' cease-fire (120 seconds). CBS also focused on the Shevardnadze trip to Kabul, in a 90-second story on January 7. Subsequently, it provided an overview of cease-fire developments from Mujahideen perspectives, with four separate stories (on January 14, 15, 17 and 30) totaling 250 seconds. ⁵³

INSTANCES OF SUBSTANTIAL COVERAGE BY ONE NETWORK ALONE

During some months in the period January 1986 through August 1987, one network's evening news coverage of Afghanistan markedly exceeded that of the

⁵² Also, the eight Afghanistan "focus stories" appearing on ABC World News Tonight in January 1987 were the most an evening news program had presented in a single month since June 1980, when ABC, CBS and NBC respectively scheduled 11, 12 and 9 stories focusing on the Afghanistan conflict.

⁵³ Unlike those of ABC and NBC, however, CBS's on-the-scene reports came not from Kabul but from the Afghan border (January 14, 110 seconds) and from the Pakistan foothill city of Peshawar (January 17, 100 seconds). These stories focused primarily on the strategy of the Afghan guerrillas in response to the Soviets' cease-fire.

other two networks. This was the case for NBC in one month, for ABC in another month, and for CBS in five other months.

NBC

February 1986: While ABC and CBS presented no stories focusing on Afghanistan during this month, NBC on February 5 examined the role of Islam as a unifying force in Afghanistan in a 290-second story. NBC's correspondent reported the story from Kabul following his experience on a government-sponsored tour of the Afghan countryside.

ABC

June 1986: An ABC feature story on June 30 considered for 200 seconds the difficulties confronted by Afghan immigrants in the United States. CBS and NBC presented during the same month 30 seconds and 60 seconds of Afghanistan "focus" coverage respectively.

CBS

March 1986: Film footage of the Mujahideen in battle, shown at length on CBS, contributed, to an unusually large amount of Afghanistan "focus" coverage --800 seconds (13.3 minutes). Most of the coverage concerned an Afghan guerrilla offensive against the Soviet outpost of Khost, which was filmed by independent cameramen Mike Hoover and Ron Pierce and presented by CBS in a two-part report on March 20 and 21 totaling 550 seconds. Additional Afghanistan news came on March 31 in a 250-second story analyzing the military significance of the Reagan Administration decision to ship supply shoulder-

held Stinger missiles to the Mujahideen. During the same month, NBC presented 140 seconds of Afghanistan "focus" coverage (a lead story in its March 30 newscast, on the major shift in Administration policy in providing Stinger missiles to the Afghan resistance). ABC presented no news focusing on Afghanistan.

February 1987: While ABC and NBC afforded 20 seconds to the Afghanistan conflict (both on February 9 reporting the death toll when Afghan guerrillas shot down a Soviet aircraft), CBS's "focus" coverage totaled 440 seconds (7.3 minutes). After briefly (30 seconds) reporting the downed aircraft story on February 9, CBS refocused on the Afghanistan conflict on February 19, in a 260-second story examining the impact on that country of the Soviets' occupation. A week later, on February 26, a CBS correspondent from the Pakistan foothill town of Peshawar told of Pakistan's support for the Afghan resistance (140 seconds), followed the next evening by a short (10-second) report on Soviet air raids on Pakistan border areas.

March 1987: As it had the preceding month, CBS presented much more extensive news coverage about Afghanistan (430 seconds, or 7.0 minutes) than did ABC and NBC (30 and zero seconds respectively). Of CBS's six Afghanistan "focus stories," the most substantial were a March 9 report describing the efforts of Afghan refugees to gain legal entry into the United States (160 seconds) and a March 10 status report on the Afghan conflict (180 seconds).

July 1987: CBS provided 220 seconds (3.7 minutes) of "focus" coverage of the Afghanistan conflict, while there was no coverage either by ABC or NBC. The CRS reportage consisted of one story, on July 29, which examined how gem dealing was helping to finance the Mujahideen war effort.

August 1987: Afghanistan reporting on CBS totaled 700 seconds (11.7 minutes). Most (670 seconds) came on August 11 and 12, when a two-part report by CBS discussed Soviet casualties and the impact of U.S. weapons on the conflict.⁵⁴ NBC meanwhile presented 180 seconds of Afghanistan news, the principal item being an August 20 story which showed audience participants of a Soviet television program discussing the war in Afghanistan (140 seconds). ABC's "focus" coverage consisted of a 20-second report on August 13 on the downing by guerrillas of a Soviet transport plane with U.S.-made Stinger missiles (a story also carried briefly that evening by CBS and NBC).

⁵⁴ Although CBS attributed the film footage to Mike Hoover "on assignment for CBS," network officials later acknowledged that a key portion of the filming had been done by a young Afghan who had received camera training under a program funded by the U.S. Information Agency (USIA). The video segment in question, filmed by Mohammed Salam, focused on a convoy of Soviet tanks and trucks as they came under a rocket-propelled grenade attack by the Mujahideen. In subsequent correspondence with officials of Boston University, CBS executives said the network had used Mr. Salam's film inadvertently; further, they said, had network editors known that the film footage had been the result of a U.S.-government funded program, they might have been proscribed under CBS's own rules from using the material. (As noted earlier, in the introduction of this report, Boston University--under contract with the USIA--had sent communications specialists to Peshawar, Pakistan in 1987 to train members of the Afghan resistance, including Mr. Salam, in camera, writing and editing techniques.) Tempest, Rone. Afghanistan War Pictures Under Attack. Los Angeles Times, Jan. 13, 1988. Part. VI, p. 8. See also Associated Press dispatch. Boston U. To Halt Afghan News Project. Washington Times, Nov. 23, 1987. p. A7.

In a more recent interview, however, a CBS News editor said that the network would not rule out completely the possible use of Mujahideen-supplied film footage in the future. As a general rule, he said, CBS News had declined to use such material "because we feel it raises more questions than it answers." Nonetheless, he added, if such footage were "truly extraordinary and unduplicable," CBS would "have to consider" its suitability as news broadcast material. DeCesare, Don, foreign news editor, CBS News. Telephone interview. Feb. 2, 1988.

NEGLIGIBLE COVERAGE FOR EXTENDED PERIODS

Unlike CBS, which provided at least a few minutes of coverage of the Afghanistan conflict almost with monthly regularity,⁵⁵ ABC presented little or no coverage of the Afghanistan conflict for months at a time during the period January 1986-August 1987; extended periods of relatively little Afghanistan coverage by that network were the months of January-April 1986 (zero seconds of Afghanistan "focus" coverage), July-November 1986 (30 seconds), and February-August 1987 (180 seconds). For its part, NBC devoted 40 seconds altogether to the Afghan conflict during the months February-July 1987.

ABC

January-April 1986: ABC provided no coverage focusing on Afghanistan during the first four months of 1986.⁵⁶ According to the Vanderbilt abstracts, the network's only mention of the Afghanistan conflict during the same period was a January 17 story focusing on terrorism in Lebanon.⁵⁷ ABC's first Afghanistan "focus" coverage of 1986 was a May 4 report on the resignation of Afghan Communist leader Babrak Karmal (20 seconds), followed later that month, on May 27, by a filmed account of a Soviet offensive against the Mujahideen (150 seconds).

⁵⁵ In 15 of the 20 months in question, CBS afforded at least 150 seconds (2.5 minutes) of news coverage to the Afghanistan story, with January-February 1986 the only consecutive months during which monthly "focus" coverage was less than 150 seconds. See Table 1, appendix C.

⁵⁶ CBS and NBC meanwhile devoted 1,060 seconds (17.7 minutes) and 620 seconds (10.3 minutes) respectively to the war in Afghanistan. See Table 1.

⁵⁷ The story, among other things, noted the different ways in which guerrillas are perceived in Afghanistan and Nicaragua.

July-November 1986: ABC from July through November 1986 focused on the Afghanistan conflict in two stories totaling 30 seconds. The first, an August 5 news item, noted that the cultural exchanges between the United States and the U.S.S.R., which had been suspended since the Soviets' invasion of Afghanistan, were being resumed (10 seconds). The second story was an October 8 report on the reaction of Defense Secretary Caspar W. Weinberger to a U.S.S.R. announcement of a partial troop withdrawal from Afghanistan (20 seconds). 58

February-August 1987: After unusually extensive reporting of the Afghanistan conflict in January 1987, totalling 14.5 minutes, ⁵⁹ ABC's coverage of the topic fell sharply. During the seven subsequent months, ABC presented altogether 180 seconds of Afghanistan "focus" coverage, an average of 25.6 seconds per month. This coverage consisted of five brief stories (each 10 to 20 seconds in length) about air warfare over Afghanistan or neighboring Pakistan ⁶⁰ and a longer (100-second) story from Kabul on May 9 showing scenes filmed during a Government-orchestrated tour of battle areas. ABC's Afghanistan coverage from February through August was greatly exceeded by the

⁵⁸ ABC's 30 seconds of Afghanistan coverage during the five months compared to 1200 seconds (20.0 minutes) by CBS and 680 seconds (11.3 minutes) by NBC. See Table 1.

⁵⁹ See preceding discussion, p. 24-25, describing the nature of ABC's Afghanistan "focus" coverage in January 1987.

⁶⁰ Specifically these stories reported: -- on February 9, the death toll from the guerrillas' downing of a Soviet plane (20 seconds); -- on March 23, an air raid on Pakistan by planes of the Afghanistan air force (20 seconds); -- on March 30, Pakistan's downing of an Afghan jet fighter (10 seconds); -- on June 11, the guerrillas' reported use of a U.S.-made Stinger missile to down a domestic passenger plane over Afghanistan (10 seconds); -- on August 13, the reported downing by the Mujahideen of a Soviet transport plane, again with the use of a Stinger missile (20 seconds).

amount presented by CBS during the same period--2100 seconds (35.0 minutes), ⁶¹ but was roughly comparable to the 220 seconds of Afghanistan "focus" coverage reported by NBC during the seven months in question.

NBC

February-July 1987: A total of 40 seconds of news on NBC focused on the Afghanistan conflict during this half-year period. This consisted of a February 9 story of the Mujahideen shooting down a Soviet plane (20 seconds) and a June 11 report on the guerrillas' use of U.S.-made Stinger missiles (also 20 seconds). Meanwhile, three other stories, while not concerned primarily with Afghanistan (and therefore not counted as Afghanistan "focus stories"), did allude to the conflict there. ⁶²

⁶¹ See preceding pages, in section titled "Substantial Coverage by One Network Alone," for description of the stories CBS presented during the months of February, March, July and August 1987.

⁶² These were a March 13 analysis of the Central Intelligence Agency's acquisition of a Soviet Mi-24 helicopter, an April 16 review of recent reforms initiated by Soviet leader Mikhail Gorbachev, and a June 14 profile of a rock music star in the USSR (who in the course of the profile compared the Soviets' involvement in Afghanistan to the United States' experience in Vietnam).

AFGHANISTAN COVERAGE DURING THE REAGAN-GORBACHEV SUMMIT MEETING

A major world event occurred in December 1987 which involved the conflict in Afghanistan and was the "lead story" on all three networks' evening news programs for five consecutive days. This was the summit meeting in Washington of President Reagan and Soviet General Secretary Mikhail Gorbachev. While the centerpiece of the summit talks was the reduction of nuclear weapons by the two superpowers, discussion of a timetable for Soviet withdrawal from Afghanistan as, at Mr. Reagan's insistence, also placed on the summit agenda.

Against this backdrop, it seemed likely that the networks' evening news coverage of the Afghanistan conflict during the Washington summit would be more extensive than usual. To test this hypothesis, CRS obtained from the three networks complete verbatim transcripts of their evening news programs for the period Monday, December 7 (the day on which Mr. Gorbachev arrived in Washington) through Friday, December 11 (when the Soviet leader returned to Moscow). Although not showing the beginning or ending times of stories within the news programs (making impossible measurement of Afghanistan coverage in seconds or minutes), the transcripts nonetheless indicate that, indeed, Afghanistan received an unusually prominent treatment on the evening newscasts that week.

CBS

Of the three network evening news programs, CBS's provided the most extensive discussion of Afghanistan during the summit week. Its December 7 lead story, while focusing on missile reduction efforts as the "center of controversy," mentioned the issue of Afghanistan at three different points. Another story later in the program reported protest demonstrations across the nation, including those in which Afghan refugees called on the Soviets to leave Afghanistan.

Although CBS made no mention of Afghanistan in its evening news on December 8, the network's December 9 newscast began with a report in which Mr. Reagan and his Soviet counterpart were said to have gone "one-on-one on Afghanistan" in that day's summit talks. It portrayed General Secretary Gorbachev as having offered a timetable for withdrawing from Afghanistan in return for U.S. concessions on long-range strategic missiles (a linkage, according to CBS, which President Reagan was believed to have rejected). The report presented videotape of Mr. Gorbachev declaring the USSR's readiness to withdraw from Afghanistan. Moments later, a network correspondent described the Soviet leader's meeting earlier in the day with Congressional leaders as "a tough audience which told Gorbachev to get out of Afghanistan." Senator Robert C. Byrd, D-W.Va., the Senate Majority Leader, was then shown, relating to reporters that he had reminded Mr. Gorbachev of the obstacles that the Soviets' invasion of Afghanistan in 1979 had placed in the way of Senate ratification of the SALT II Treaty between the United States and the USSR.

Later in the December 9 program, another CBS story on Afghanistan began by noting that wounded Afghan refugee children in a plea for peace had attempted to march to the Soviet embassy but were stopped by the police. This

was followed by a network correspondent's report from inside Afghanistan on difficulties encountered by the Soviets in their efforts to train the Afghan army into an effective fighting force. The story ended with an interview between the network's anchorman and Defense Secretary Frank Carlucci dealing with the conditions under which the USSR might withdraw from Afghanistan.

In the last two days of summit coverage, CBS made only brief references to the Afghanistan conflict. On December 10, the sole mention of Afghanistan came in the program's concluding story, which reviewed the history of past summit meetings of U.S. and Soviet leaders. The story noted that among the disillusioning events following a 1979 meeting between President Jimmy Carter and Soviet leader Leonid Brezhnev was the USSR's invasion of Afghanistan. On December 11, one reference was made Afghanistan: The program's lead story, assessing the results of the summit meeting, observed that, while President Reagan on the whole had received positive marks, there was criticism that the summit had "failed to produce results on human rights or Afghanistan."

NBC

In each of its evening newscasts during the December 7-9 period, NBC made mention of Afghanistan. At first, the network treated the Afghan conflict as a relevant but peripheral issue to the summit meeting. By mid-week, however, the network had placed Afghanistan at the center of its summit news coverage.

On December 7, as NBC set the stage for the summit, it referred to Afghanistan once, mid-way through its lead story. The network reported that, although White House officials were seeking from the Soviets a timetable for leaving Afghanistan, the Reagan-Gorbachev meeting was "basically an arms-control summit." Afghanistan again received one mention on December 8. Near

the end of that evening's lead story on the summit, a network correspondent noted that while President Reagan and Soviet leader Gorbachev were meeting, hundreds of demonstrators had massed across from the White House, in protest of the USSR's occupation of Afghanistan.

NBC enhanced its coverage of the Afghanistan issue on December 9. The conflict was described by the network anchorman, in his opening report, as one of "the tough issues" that had separated Mr. Reagan and his Soviet visitor in talks earlier that day. NBC showed videotape of General Secretary Gorbachev stating through an interpreter his readiness to discuss with President Reagan the specifics of a Soviet withdrawal from Afghanistan. A network correspondent reported, however, that despite the accommodating tone of Mr. Gorbachev's public statement, U.S. officials were still encountering a "hard line" from the Soviet leader in private. Then, in a live interview, the NBC's anchorman asked Howard Baker, the White House chief of staff, whether the Soviets had come forth with any new proposals on the "difficult issues," among which Afghanistan was mentioned.⁶³ Following its summit news from Washington, NBC's December 9 program presented an filmed account of the military situation in Afghanistan. The report concentrated on the military problems of the Soviet occupation force and the shakiness of the Kabul regime which Moscow was supporting.

NBC's lead story of December 10, reporting the end of the three-day meeting, focused on the continuing differences between Mr. Reagan and Soviet leader Gorbachev. The network's anchorman, while noting that the two leaders had emphasized the progress they had made in their talks, singled out four key issues on which no breakthrough had occurred--one of which was said to be

⁶³ Mr. Baker, the transcripts indicated, declined to describe the nature of the Soviets' proposals, and his response, characterizing the scope of the Reagan-Gorbachev discussions, omitted mention of Afghanistan.

Afghanistan. ⁶⁴ Subsequently, President Reagan was shown stating that on regional issues he and Mr. Gorbachev had bluntly expressed different viewpoints. ⁶⁵

Afghanistan was mentioned once on NBC's newscast of December 11. At the end of the program's lead story analyzing the importance of the summit talks, a correspondent reported that "by stone-walling Mr. Reagan on Afghanistan and human rights," Mr. Gorbachev had denied his more conservative opponents in the Soviet Union "a stick to beat him with."

ABC

Of the three networks' evening news programs, ABC World News Tonight gave the least amount of attention to Afghanistan in its summit week coverage. The conflict, nonetheless, was treated prominently on one newscast as a key issue in the summit discussions, and brief references were made to Afghanistan on two other evenings.

ABC's December 7 reporting of the summit had two primary points of focus-- the agreement already reached between the Reagan Administration and the Soviets to eliminate intermediate range nuclear (INF) missiles, and the upcoming talks between President Reagan and General Secretary Gorbachev on reducing strategic nuclear weapons; Afghanistan was not mentioned. On December 8, following extensive reporting on the historic signing of the

⁶⁴ The other issues on which the two leaders were said to remain at odds involved long-range nuclear weapons, research on defense weapons for use in outer space ("Star Wars"), and human rights.

⁶⁵ Elaboration on this point then came from a network correspondent, who reported that Mr. Gorbachev had declined to tell President Reagan when the Soviets would leave Afghanistan and demanded that the United States cut off aid to the Mujahideen first.

INF treaty earlier in the day by the President and the General Secretary, an incidental reference to Afghanistan was made. During anti-Soviet demonstrations in Washington, the anchorman noted, the police had arrested "some Afghanistan protesters who didn't have a permit"

Afghanistan emerged to take center stage on ABC's December 9 newscast. In his opening remarks, the network's anchorman cited the Soviet occupation of Afghanistan and reduction of long-range missiles as the two main topics discussed that day by President Reagan and Mr. Gorbachev. The two leaders were described as having moved on, from the signing of an arms control treaty, to more difficult "regional issues, primarily what is going to happen in Afghanistan." As CBS and NBC also had done, ABC showed videotape of Mr. Gorbachev stating that his discussions with President Reagan regarding the USSR's withdrawal from Afghanistan would be "more specific" than earlier Soviet pronouncements on the subject. The network's White House correspondent then reported, however, that according to sources the Soviet leader actually had not set out a specific timetable for a withdrawal in the meetings with President Reagan which followed.

Upon the conclusion of the Washington summit, on December 10, ABC again referred to Afghanistan. Providing a "scorecard" of what was and was not achieved at the summit, a network correspondent (after reviewing the arms reductions issues) reported that on Afghanistan "there was vigorous, sometimes heated, debate, but the Soviets set no timetable for their withdrawal." On December 11, in its end-of-week analysis of the summit's importance for future U.S.-Soviet relations, ABC's newscast omitted mention of Afghanistan.

NEWS COVERAGE ARISING FROM AUTHORIZED VISITS TO AFGHANISTAN

A noteworthy development in the television networks' evening news coverage of the war in Afghanistan in 1986 and 1987 was the occasional opportunity for reporting based on a network correspondent's authorized visit to Afghanistan. Such news coverage had not been allowed by the Soviet Union during most of the 1980-85 period. Examination of Vanderbilt abstracts of network programming from January 17, 1980, when Western journalists were ordered out of the country, through the end of 1985 identified no stories by network correspondents visiting Afghanistan openly with the evident authorization of either the Soviet Union or the Kabul government.

With 1986, however, came signs of a change in the USSR's strict policy of excluding American network personnel. On February 5, NBC correspondent Steve Hurst reported from Kabul on the role of Islam as a unifying force in Afghanistan, after having participated in a government-sponsored tour of the Afghan countryside. Subsequently, in October, American journalists were again permitted into Afghanistan on the occasion of a partial troop withdrawal by the Soviets. NBC broadcast reports from correspondent Hurst from Kabul on October 14 and from Shindand, a town in the western Afghanistan province of Farah, on October 15. From the same places and on the same days, CRS Evening News also presented stories by foreign correspondent Bert Quint, as well as a third Quint report on October 18, from Kabul.

Network stories from correspondents on the scene in Afghanistan appeared on the evening news again in January 1987. This time permission to report

first-hand from Kabul coincided with a unilateral cease-fire announced by the Soviet Union. NBC Nightly News carried one report by correspondent Hurst on January 15, while ABC World News Tonight presented five Kabul-based accounts by correspondent Walter Rodgers on January 14,15,16,17, and 20. ⁶⁶

Several months later, on May 9, 1987, ABC correspondent Hilary Bowker reported from Kabul, following a government-sponsored tour of a recent battle area. Included in the report was a videotaped statement by Afghanistan's foreign minister condemning "conspiracies" against the Afghan people.

Most recently, in December 1987, CBS presented two reports from Kabul by correspondent Mark Phillips. The first story, on December 3, described the precarious status of the Soviet-backed Afghanistan government and the retrenchment of Soviet military forces around Kabul. A follow-up report on December 9 told of the frustrated efforts of the Soviets to "shape the 40,000-strong Afghan Army into a real fighting force."

⁶⁶ CBS, meanwhile, presented a January 14 report from correspondent Bert Quint based on his unauthorized visit to an Afghanistan border area. His story focused on the Afghan guerrillas' reaction to the Soviet cease-fire.

THE TELEVISION NETWORKS' FUTURE ACCESS TO AFGHANISTAN

As the preceding pages have shown, the ABC, CBS and NBC television networks as a group provided a greater amount of Afghanistan news coverage on their regular evening news programs in 1986 than they had in any year since 1980. Partial data for 1987 indicated a projected annual total at least comparable to that for 1986.⁶⁷ A primary factor in this increased level of coverage in 1986 and 1987 appear to have been important new developments in the longstanding Afghanistan conflict. These included initiatives by the Soviet Union concerning a troop withdrawal from Afghanistan and the improved battlefield performances of the Mujahideen, which significantly raised the prospects that the USSR actually might end its military presence in the foreseeable future.⁶⁸ Another factor affecting the over-all level of network coverage was the editorial approach of one network, CBS, to treat the on-going military struggle as a continuing story meriting prominent, periodic coverage on the evening news.⁶⁹ A third factor was the new willingness of the USSR and

⁶⁷ See above, pages 15-17.

⁶⁸ For instance, we have seen in this report (p. 24-25) that all three networks extensively covered the January 1987 visit of Soviet foreign minister Shevardnadze to Kabul and his remarks regarding the prospects for a Soviet pull-out. Similarly the three networks all provided filmed reports later that month on the unilateral cease-fire initiated by the Soviet Union. (The Soviet initiative especially drew attention from ABC, which presented five separate reports from Afghanistan related to the cease-fire.)

⁶⁹ In a telephone interview, Don DeCesare, the foreign news editor of CBS News, characterized the Afghanistan conflict as "an important story that we can cover well." He added that without enough employees in CBS to keep
(continued...)

the pro-Soviet Afghan government to grant visas to Western journalists for occasional visits into Afghanistan to view the progress of the war from the vantage point of secure, government-controlled cities.⁷⁰ Although confined in their movements by government-sponsored tours, network correspondents nonetheless took advantage of this new access to report on-the-scene from Afghanistan, for the first time in more than five years.⁷¹

Against the backdrop of increased Afghanistan news coverage in 1986 and 1987, events in 1988 may further magnify the importance of Afghanistan as a network news story. One network foreign news editor predicts that "the story will escalate. As the Soviets' presence diminishes, there'll be an increased network presence."⁷² At the same time, however, covering the Afghanistan conflict in 1988 will pose new challenges for the television networks. For Western news organizations the story of the Afghanistan conflict might increasingly focus on negotiations sponsored by the United Nations to reach a

⁶⁹ (...continued)

constant track of the Afghanistan story his news organization instead had established, through outside contractors and other sources, a "network of people that we can trust" to provide film material and news from Afghanistan on a periodic basis. Meanwhile, CBS was "actively seeking visas all the time" so that CBS correspondents could have "regular access" to Afghanistan. Instances of Soviet or Afghan officials granting visas, he said, were "infrequent but getting better." DeCesare, Don. Telephone interview. Dec. 15, 1987.

⁷⁰ In a telephone interview, Walter Porges, ABC's director of foreign news, said that correspondents of that network were "restricted" but made "fairly productive" use of their few authorized visits to Afghanistan. Porges, Walter. Telephone interview. Dec. 22, 1987.

⁷¹ Jeremy Lamprecht, NBC's general manager of foreign news, described an authorized visit to Afghanistan as "going to Kabul and reporting the official line." Whether in a group or individual tour, he said, "you see what they (the Soviets or Afghan officials) want you to see under escort." Such occasional visits afforded the network opportunities to "see the Soviets at work, on patrol...and scenes of Afghan life." He added that if the "freedom to move around were better" for correspondents during their visits in Soviet-controlled areas, "we'd probably stay longer." Lamprecht, Jeremy. Telephone interview. Dec. 23, 1987.

For a newspaper correspondent's account of the restrictions which the Afghan government placed on foreign reporters during a tour outside the provincial capital of Jalalabad in January 1987, see Taubman, Philip. Afghan Visit Shows Damage of a Continuing War. New York Times, Jan. 22, 1987. p. A6.

⁷² Porges, Walter (ABC News). Telephone interview. Dec. 22, 1987.

settlement under which the Soviets would agree to withdraw and a new Afghan government would be established. ⁷³ Complicating this story are uncertainties over whether the seven main Afghan resistance groups will present a unified front on settlement terms and whether any form of Communist participation in a new government will be acceptable to them. ⁷⁴ During continuing negotiations over a timetable for withdrawal of the Soviets' occupying force, other stories are likely to focus on concerns of the United States that the Soviet forces during a phased withdrawal might exploit any reduction in the United States' military assistance to the Mujahideen. ⁷⁵ A major human interest story will be the fate of the five million Afghan refugees and the conditions under which they might be allowed to return to their country. ⁷⁶

These inter-related stories, full of complexity and nuances not always easily communicated in two-minute reports on the evening news, will test the

⁷³ NBC's general manager of foreign news maintains that the current "importance of the story [of the Afghanistan conflict] is the fact of the Soviet presence . . . and when and whether they are going to withdraw." Lamprecht, Jeremy. Telephone interview. Dec. 23, 1987.

⁷⁴ See Weintraub, Richard M. Afghan Rebels Reject Power Sharing in Kabul. Washington Post, Jan. 18, 1988. p. A13, A16; Rebel Role Expected in New Afghan Talks. Washington Times, Jan. 19, 1988. p. A8; Beeston, Richard. Afghan Resistance Shuns U.N. Talks. Washington Times, Jan. 20, 1988. p. A11.

⁷⁵ See Certz, Bill, and Willis Witter. Reagan Reverses Afghanistan Stand, Links Aid Cut to Pullout. Washington Times, Dec. 16, 1987. p. A1, A8; Ottaway, David B. Afghan Rebel Aid Cutoff Tied to Details of Soviet Departure. Washington Post, Dec. 22, 1987. p. A19.

During President Reagan's December 1987 summit discussions with Soviet leader Gorbachev on Afghanistan, the Reagan Administration was described as concerned that aid not be cut off to the Afghan guerrillas during a phased Soviet withdrawal "only to have the remaining Soviet forces stage an offensive against weakened forces." Apple, R.W. 2 Leaders Discuss Long-Range Arms and Afghan War. New York Times, Dec. 10, 1987. p. A18.

⁷⁶ See for example Getler, Michael. Refugees Face Uncertainty; Welcome Mat Wearing Thin for Afghans. Washington Post, Nov. 9, 1987. p. A1, A25. See also Evans, Rowland, and Robert Novak. The Soviets' Deep Roots in Afghanistan. Washington Post, Jan. 25, 1988. p. A13, in which the authors state that a "question coming soon is whether the [Reagan] administration will commit itself to postwar rehabilitation and reform with the same zeal it has shown in arming the mujaheddin freedom fighters."

reporting capabilities of the television networks. Similar to the first eight years of the war in Afghanistan, the extent of network coverage in 1988 and the ability of correspondents to report informatively on that conflict will be affected, among other things, by the on-the-scenes access that network personnel will have to that country. Network reports during government-authorized visits to Afghanistan will be of limited informational value if correspondents are closely supervised and restricted by the Soviets in what they can see or hear. Reports about the Afghanistan resistance may be fragmentary, sporadic, and unreliable if networks continue to refrain from assigning correspondents to accompany the guerrillas because of the serious dangers in accepting such assignments.

It might be argued that the time is ripe for the Western news media in general and the American television networks in particular to seek from the Soviet Union improvements in the conditions under which news is reported from Afghanistan. An increased access to Afghanistan in 1988 arguably is consistent with the USSR's avowed adherence to its new policy of glasnost (openness). In an era of improving Soviet-U.S. relations, ready journalistic access to Afghanistan also would represent a means of monitoring and verification if and when the USSR begins to implement its declared goal of

withdrawing from Afghanistan. ⁷⁷ Of course, a continuation of fierce combat during and after Soviet withdrawal would understandably complicate the question of officially sanctioned access.

Coincident with important new developments and greater journalistic access to Afghan territory under Soviet control, television network evening news program coverage of the Afghanistan conflict increased measurably in 1986 and 1987. Intensified diplomatic activity aimed at a peace settlement might lead to even more extensive network news coverage of developments in Afghanistan, provided network correspondents gain increased, more meaningful and safer access to that country.

⁷⁷ Any future efforts by Western news organizations to improve reporting conditions in Afghanistan might be expected to focus on two objectives in particular: -- Greater (and ideally unsupervised) freedom of movement for correspondents authorized to visit Kabul or other government-controlled territories; -- A disavowal by the Soviet Union of an earlier threat to kill Western journalists who accompany the Afghan resistance, accompanied by an affirmation that journalists are entitled to the protection of civilian noncombatants under international law in the event they are present or captured during hostilities between Communist and guerrilla forces.

In the longer term, there likely will be news media interest as well in securing a right of journalists to be present throughout Afghanistan in the event a mediated settlement is achieved. Such a journalistic presence, it could be argued, would serve the international interest in peace by witnessing and reporting how faithfully the two sides were complying with the settlement terms. This argument, conventional and widely accepted in the West, might well prove less than compelling among the Afghan combatants, particularly if intermittent local fighting becomes part of the settlement process.

APPENDIX A: RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

The subject of this report's first two sections was the Afghanistan news coverage on three television network news programs--ABC World News tonight, CBS Evening News, and NBC Nightly News--from January 1986 through August 1987.⁷⁸ The research for these two sections was identical in its methodology to that used for an earlier CRS report which examined Afghanistan news coverage on the same three news programs from 1980 through 1985.⁷⁹ In both cases program information contained in the Television News Index and Abstracts published monthly by Vanderbilt University's Television News Archive in Nashville, Tennessee was used as the basis for analysis. The Vanderbilt abstracts are widely recognized as the most complete printed summary available of regular evening newscasts of the three commercial networks.⁸⁰ The nature of the

⁷⁸ It again should be noted, as it was in the report's introduction, that other television news programming of ABC, CBS and NBC were not measured--e.g., news specials, morning and late night newscasts, news magazine and news interview programs. Also outside the scope of this study was the Afghanistan news coverage of other television networks such as the Cable News Network and the Public Broadcasting Service.

⁷⁹ U.S. Library of Congress. Congressional Research Service. *Television Network Evening News Coverage of the Afghanistan Conflict: The First Six Years*. Special Report, by Denis Steven Rutkus, May 29, 1986. Washington, 1986. 65 p.

⁸⁰ Indicative of this, one scholar, in explaining his reliance on the Vanderbilt abstracts for his study of international news coverage on network television, commented, "It is important to note that the Abstracts are a highly reliable source of data about international news coverage." Larson, James P. *Television's Window on the World: International Affairs Coverage on the U.S. networks*. Norwood, N.J., Ablex Publishing Corp., 1984. p. 36.

Vanderbilt publication and the manner in which its information was used to analyze the networks' Afghanistan coverage can be explained briefly as follows.

DESCRIPTION OF THE "TELEVISION NEWS INDEX AND ABSTRACTS"

Each monthly Vanderbilt volume summarizes and indexes the weekday and weekend evening broadcasts of the three networks, based on monitoring of program videotapes.

The index in each monthly volume is arranged alphabetically by topic, as well as by nations. The index terms used in each volume cite page numbers on which to find any abstracts which explicitly mentioned Afghanistan. ⁸¹

The abstracts portion of the volumes consists of descriptive summaries of the regular evening news programs of the three networks. Although not complete verbatim transcripts of the programs, the abstracts are sufficiently detailed as to identify the general topic of every news item presented on a program. Specifically, the abstracts provide a synopsis of every segment in a program where the "anchor" or a correspondent presents news material. ⁸²

On each page of program abstracts is a time column which notes the beginning time of a segment or a series of segments dealing with a particular topic. (The time is rounded off to the nearest 10 seconds.) Hence, the overall length of a series of segments dealing with Afghanistan is measurable,

⁸¹ Appearing in the indices during the period of January 1980 through August 1987 were the index terms "Afghanistan" and "Union of Soviet Socialist Republics." Under the latter index term was the sub-term "Foreign Relations--Afghanistan."

⁸² Besides identifying the anchor or correspondent making the presentation, the synopsis also briefly describes any video or interview material included in the segment.

from the beginning time of that series to the beginning time of a following segment on a different topic.

HOW ABSTRACTS WERE USED

Some abstracts dealt primarily with the situation in Afghanistan while others had some other topic as their primary focus. A research objective for this report was, in the course of measuring the networks' Afghanistan coverage, to distinguish carefully between "Afghanistan focus" coverage and coverage which merely mentioned Afghanistan.

Identifying Afghanistan "Focus Stories"

An abstract segment, it was decided, consisted of Afghanistan "focus" coverage when it explicitly treated the Afghanistan situation as a central news element. Applying this criterion proved quite easy when news segments dealt primarily or almost exclusively with Afghanistan. Clear examples of Afghanistan "focus" coverage were news segments about military clashes between the Soviets and the Afghan resistance, or about United Nations resolutions condemning the Soviet presence in Afghanistan.

Whether to designate other types of Afghanistan segments as "focus" coverage depended on the facts involved. Designated as an Afghanistan "focus story," for example, was a filmed report first showing Russian dissident Andrei Sakharov calling for the end of the Soviets' occupation of Afghanistan and then a Soviet official denying that Mr. Sakharov would be punished for his remarks on Afghanistan (ABC, December 23, 1986). The story, it was decided, was "focus" coverage because the Afghanistan situation was a central news

element in the story--with the emphasis given Afghanistan roughly equal to that afforded the other central story element, Mr. Sakharov.

Treated differently was a story on Mr. Sakharov in which he discussed his release from internal exile, the imprisonment of other dissidents, his views about Afghanistan, and a telephone call he received from Soviet leader Mikhail Gorbachev (ABC, December 24, 1986). The story was not designated as Afghanistan "focus" coverage because the central focus of the story was clearly Mr. Sakharov.

A news segment also was designated as having an Afghanistan "focus" if its treatment of the Afghanistan conflict was roughly equal to that afforded to another major world trouble spot. Classified as "focus" coverage, for example, was a story about the Reagan Administration sending Stinger missiles to guerrillas in Afghanistan and in Angola.

However, a news segment was not treated as having an Afghanistan focus if it referred to the Afghanistan crisis among more than two trouble spots or if it identified Afghanistan among a list of nations in the news.

For identification and record-keeping purposes, an Afghanistan "focus story" was any segment or continuous series of segments which explicitly treated Afghanistan as a central news element and which were preceded and followed by non-Afghanistan program material. An example of a "focus story" would be a self-contained report by the anchor on the Afghanistan conflict. Another example would be a succession of Afghanistan segments consisting of an anchor's "lead-in" and the presentation of one or more correspondents, including any transition remarks by the anchor between the correspondents' segments. These segments altogether would be recorded as one Afghanistan "focus story."

If only part of a succession of Afghanistan segments were presented immediately prior to a commercial break, with the rest following immediately after the break, two "focus stories" were recorded because the presentation of Afghanistan "focus" segments was separated by non-Afghanistan program material.

Recording the Length of Each Afghanistan "Focus Story"

The length in seconds of an Afghanistan "focus story" was measured from the beginning of the story's first segment to the end of the story's last segment. Where either a beginning time or an end time was not indicated in the abstracts, it was necessary to assign an Afghanistan "focus story" an approximate length. Sometimes, for instance, a non-Afghanistan segment was immediately followed by an Afghanistan "focus" segment, with times indicated for the beginning of the first segment and for the end of the second segment, but not for the point in-between the two segments. In these cases, for want of better information, half of the over-all time of the two segments was assigned to the Afghanistan "focus story."

Identifying and Counting Other Stories Which Mentioned Afghanistan

Also identified and counted were segments in the Vanderbilt abstracts in which Afghanistan was mentioned but was not the primary focus. Segments in this category dealt with such topics as the following:

- Reforms in the USSR initiated by Soviet leader Gorbachev, including a re-examination of the Soviets' Afghanistan policy;
- U.S.-Soviet arms control talks which ranged over various topics, including Afghanistan:

- The detention in Moscow of American journalist Nicholas Daniloff, who was accused by the Soviets, among other things, of collecting intelligence about Afghanistan for the CIA;
- Various allegations arising out of the Iran-Contra scandal, one being that funds were diverted to the Afghan resistance as well as to the Contras in Nicaragua;
- The military importance to the United States of its military ties with Pakistan, including the latter's role in assisting the Afghan resistance.

In none of these examples, it seemed clear, was Afghanistan a central story element; in each case, however, the Afghanistan conflict was an explicit point of reference. The number of such stories serves as a measure of the extent to which the networks used Afghanistan as a continuing point of reference for, or as a backdrop to, other news developments.

While segments which mentioned Afghanistan without focusing on it were counted, the length of such stories was not measured. 83

83 The rationale for not measuring lengths of segments merely mentioning Afghanistan was twofold: First, while a segment's over-all length would be measurable, the time measured for the most part would not represent Afghanistan coverage per se; second, it would be impossible to derive from the Vanderbilt abstracts the precise length of time of those portions of a segment which made explicit reference to Afghanistan.

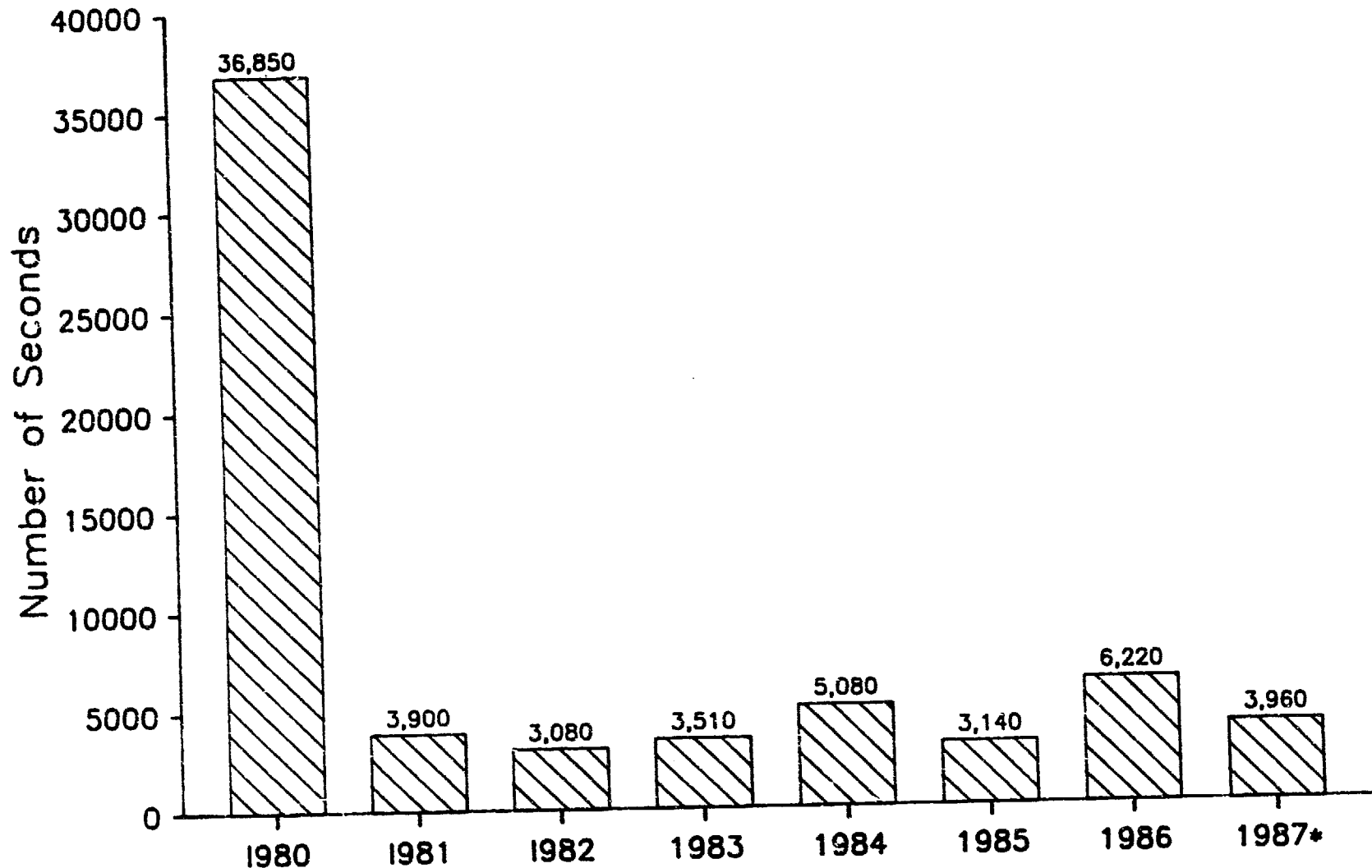
APPENDIX B: GRAPHIC SUMMARIES OF ANNUAL NETWORK DATA

The data graphically presented in this appendix depict news coverage of Afghanistan by the three major commercial television networks in the United States on their regularly scheduled evening news programs--ABC World News Tonight, CBS Evening News and NBC Nightly News.

GRAPH 1

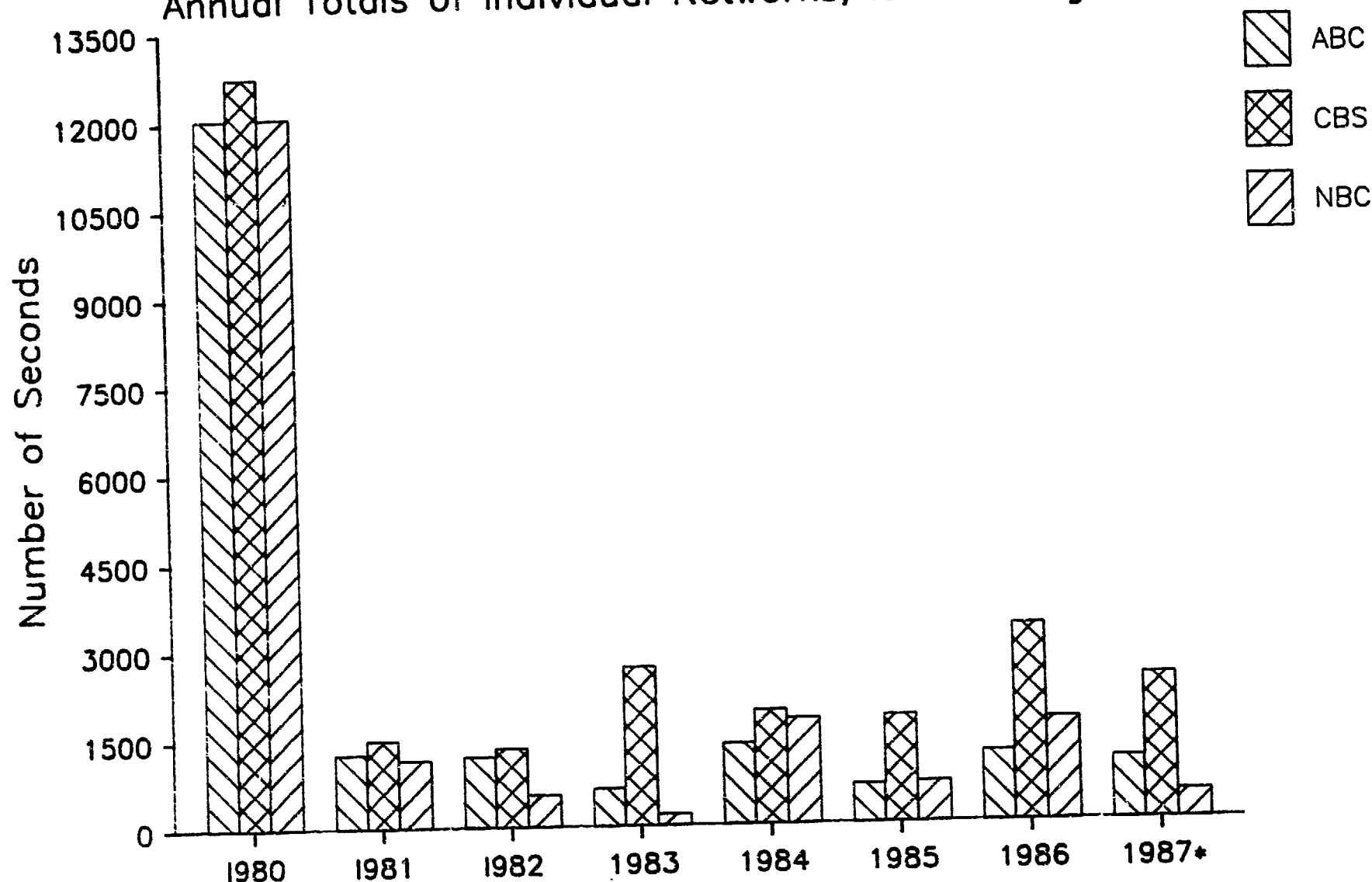
Seconds of Afghanistan Evening News Coverage

Annual Totals for All Three Networks Combined, 1980 - Aug. 1987



Seconds of Afghanistan Evening News Coverage

Annual Totals of Individual Networks, 1980 - Aug. 1987

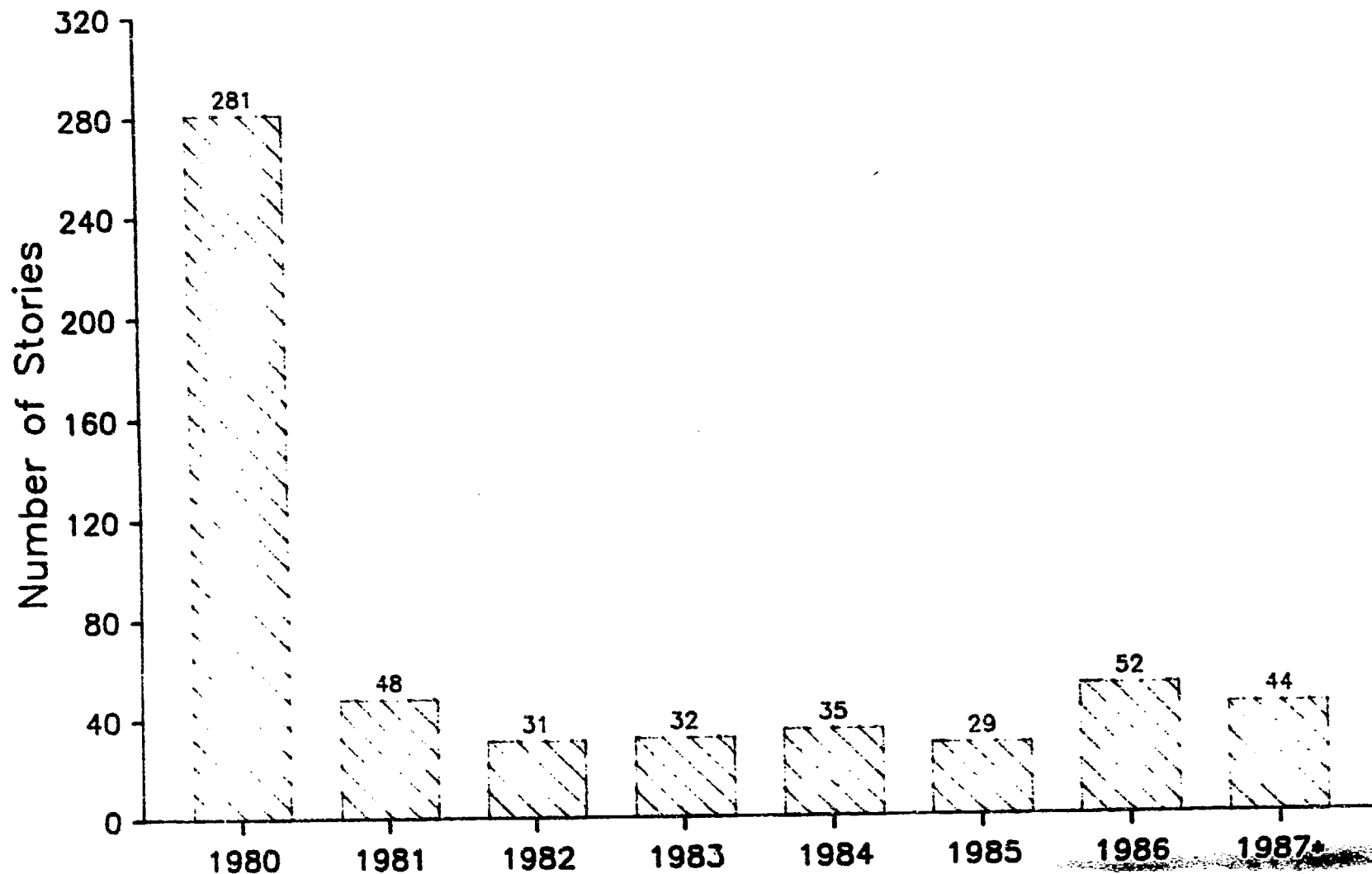


* 1987 data cover the months January through August.

GRAPH 3

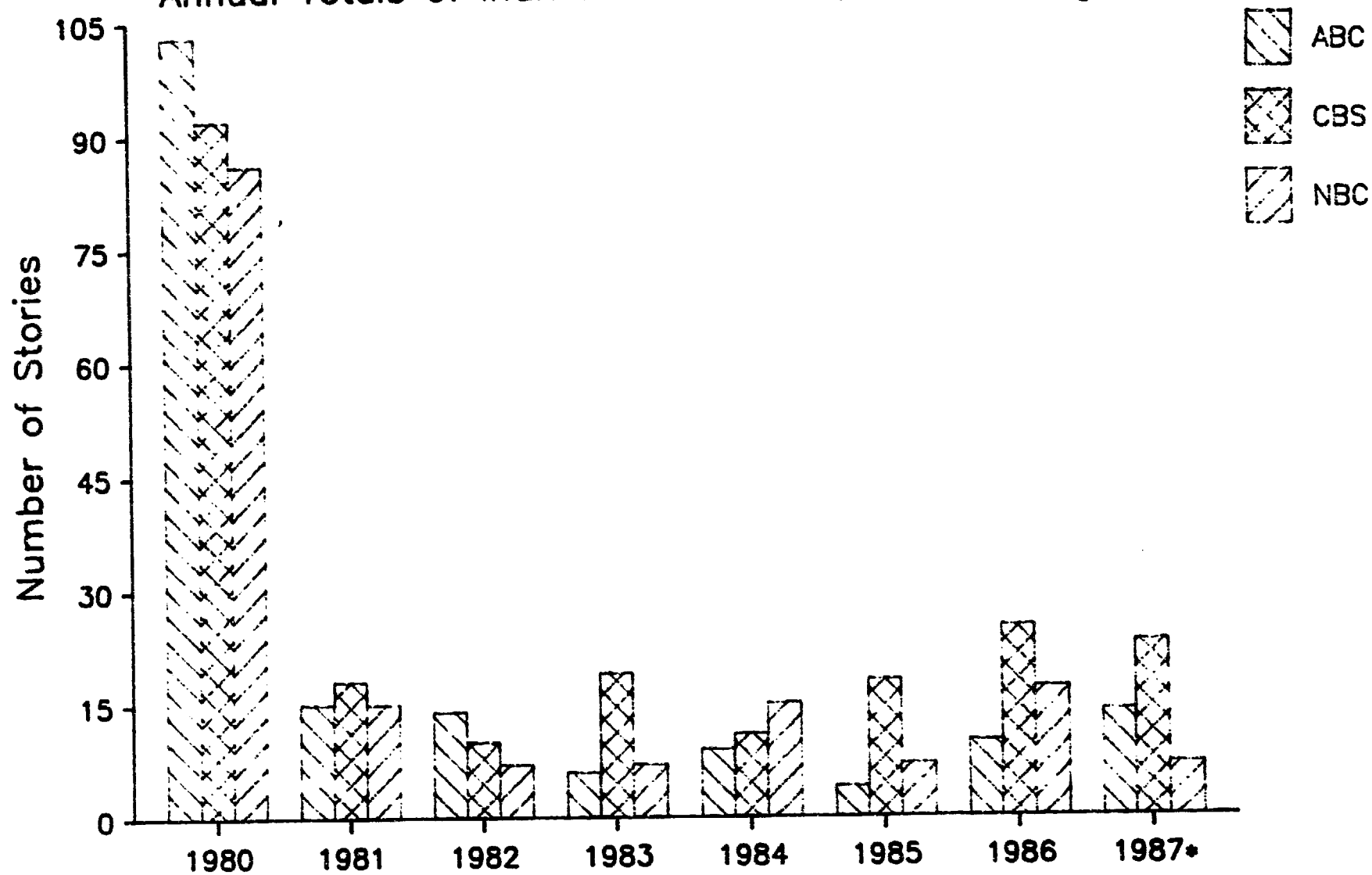
Stories Focusing on Afghanistan

Annual Totals for All Three Networks Combined, 1980 - Aug. 1987



Stories Focusing on Afghanistan

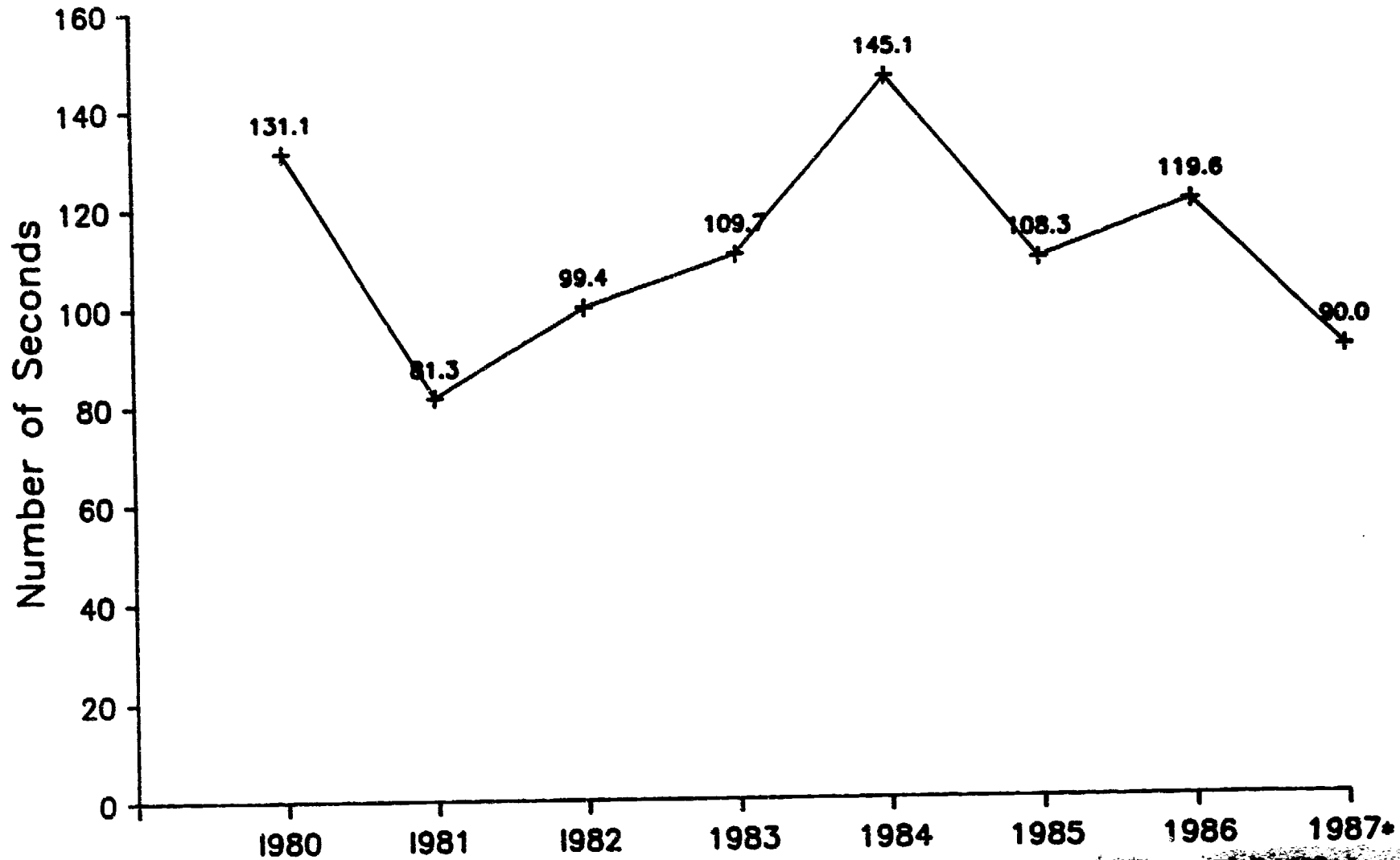
Annual Totals of Individual Networks, 1980 - Aug. 1987



* 1987 data cover the months January through August.

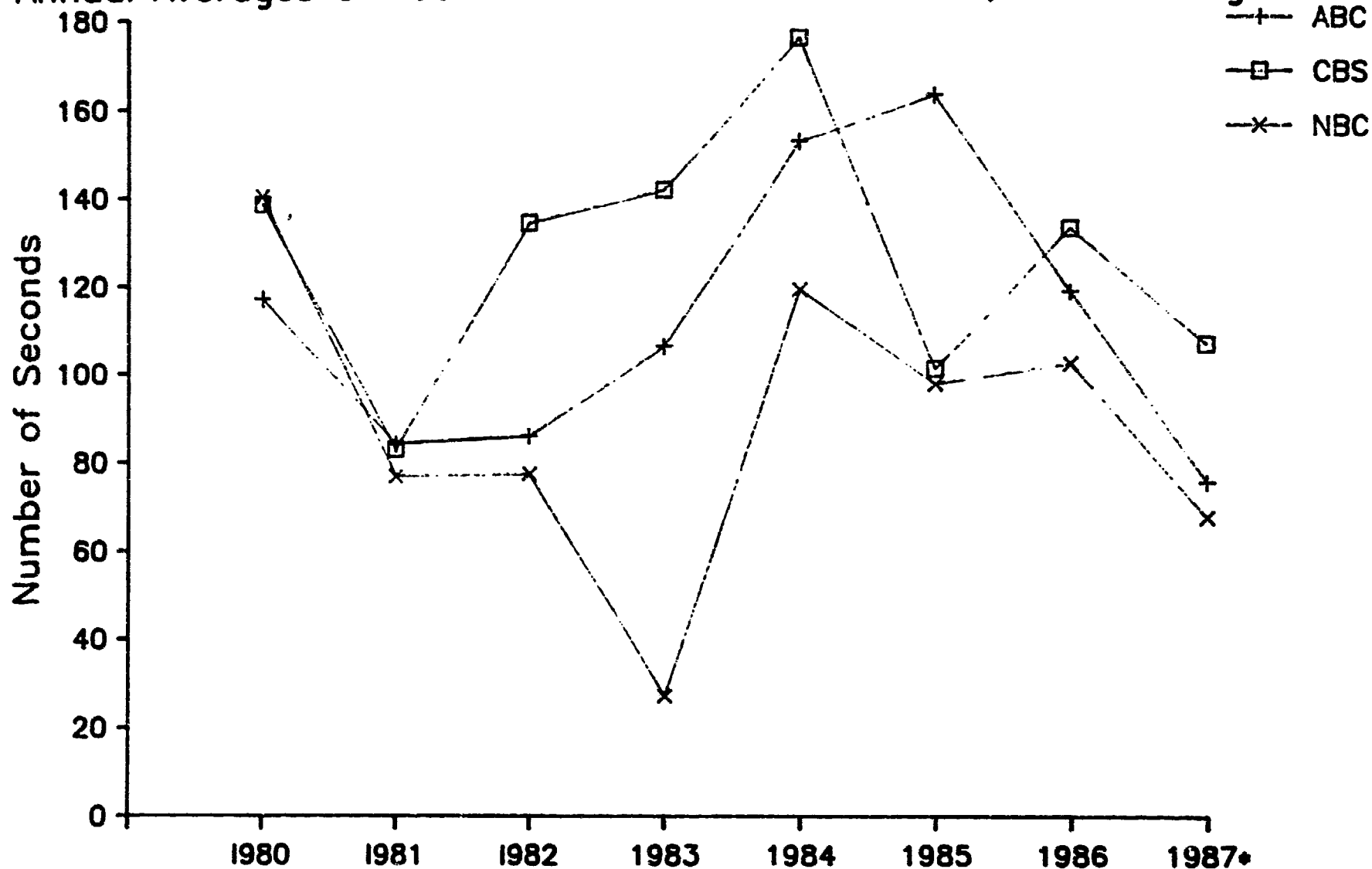
Average Length of Afghanistan Stories

Annual Averages of Focus Stories for All 3 Networks, 1980–Aug. 1987



Average Length of Afghanistan Stories

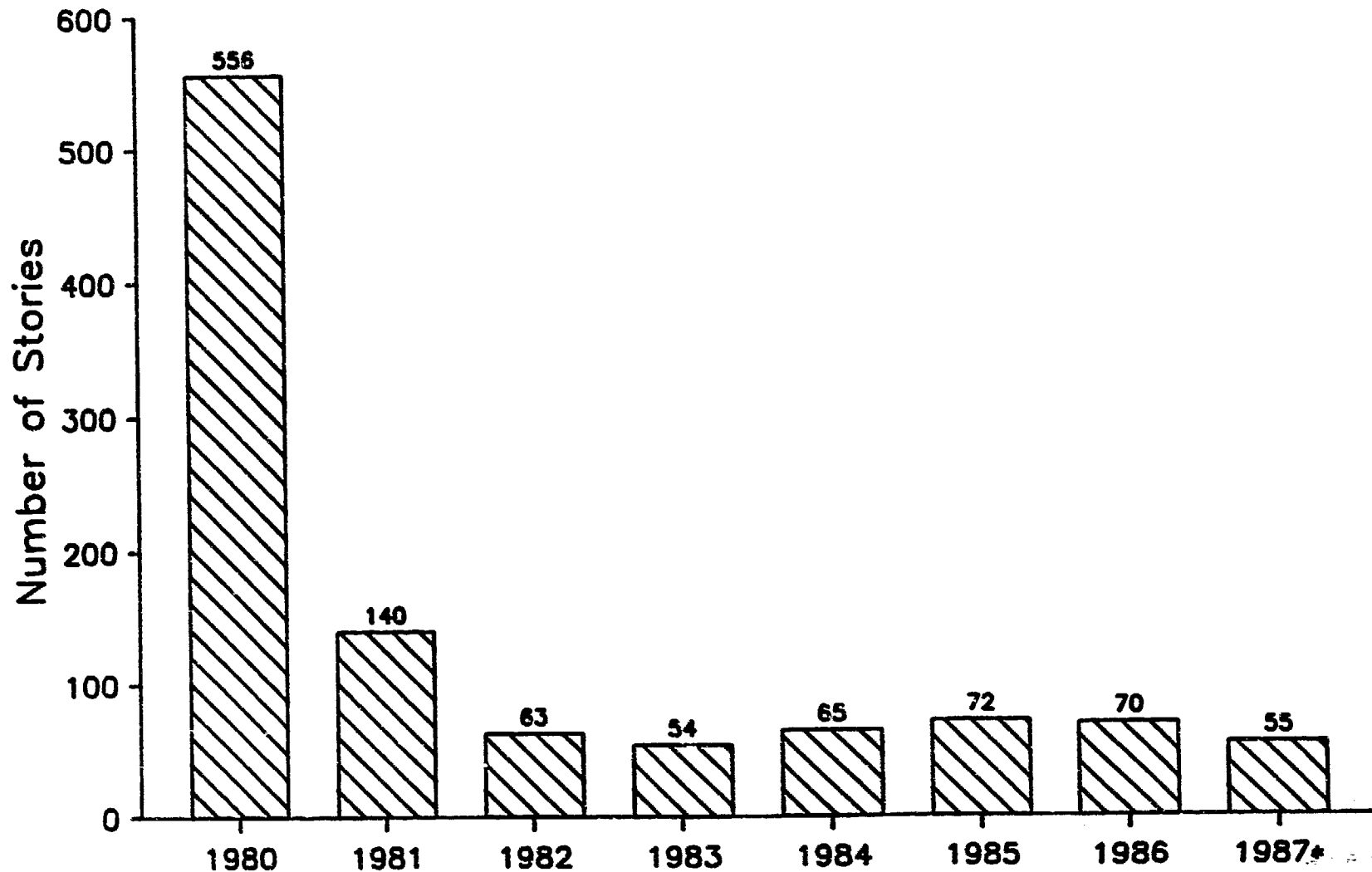
Annual Averages of Focus Stories for Each Network, 1980 - Aug. 1987



* 1987 data cover the months January through August.

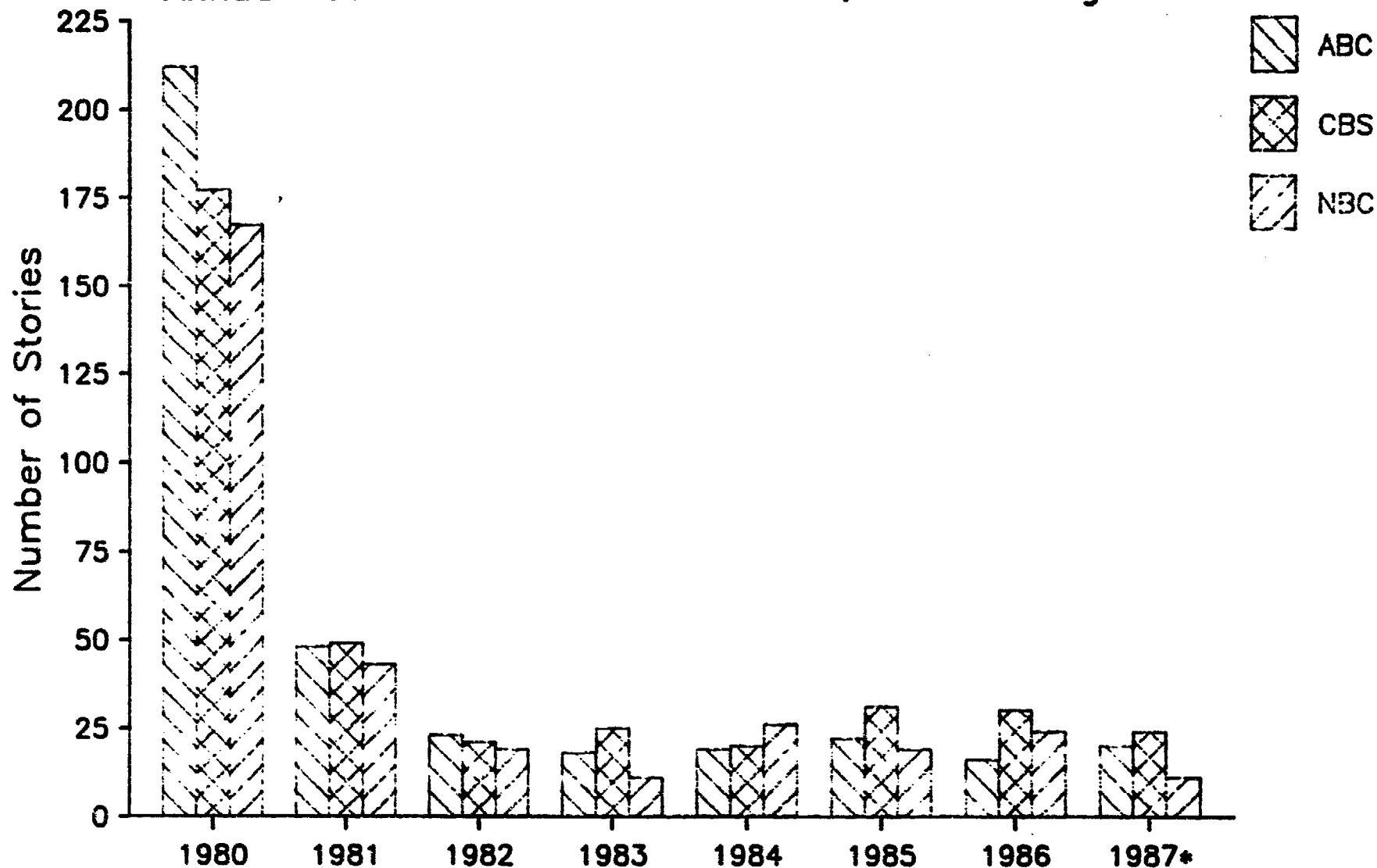
Stories Mentioning Afghanistan

Annual Totals for All Three Networks Combined, 1980 - Aug. 1987



Stories Mentioning Afghanistan

Annual Totals of Individual Networks, 1980 - Aug. 1987



* 1987 data cover the months January through August.

APPENDIX C: NETWORK DATA

The data presented in the following tables represent news coverage of Afghanistan by the three major commercial television networks in the United States on their regularly scheduled evening news program--ABC World News Tonight, CBS Evening News and NBC Nightly News. Source: Television News Index Abstracts. Vanderbilt Television News Archive. Vanderbilt University. Nashville, Tennessee. (Monthly issues for the period 1980 through August 1987).

TABLE 1. Seconds of Afghanistan 'Focus Story' Coverage, by Month, 1980-August 1987

Year/Month		ABC	CBS	NBC	Combined annual total
1980:	January	7,130	7,420	7,180	
	February	1,210	2,020	2,065	
	March	960	510	340	
	April	140	180	350	
	May	560	170	160	
	June	1,390	1,720	1,105	
	July	50	140	210	
	August	100	20	0	
	September	310	270	40	
	October	80	40	200	
	November	40	40	70	
	December	80	210	340	
	Total	12,050	12,740	12,060	36,850
1981:	January	0	0	0	
	February	0	30	0	
	March	430	270	290	
	April	40	160	0	
	May	110	40	0	
	June	250	330	40	
	July	50	0	130	
	August	0	210	0	
	September	130	30	240	
	October	0	150	0	
	November	0	0	30	
	December	250	270	420	
	Total	1,260	1,490	1,150	3,900
1982:	January	70	210	0	
	February	270	0	0	
	March	210	150	150	
	April	0	0	0	
	May	0	0	0	
	June	0	0	0	
	July	0	0	0	
	August	0	0	0	
	September	0	190	0	
	October	0	0	0	
	November	170	200	90	
	December	480	590	300	
	Total	1,200	1,340	540	3,080

TABLE 1. Seconds of Afghanistan 'Focus Story' Coverage, 1980-August 1987--Continued

Year/Month		ABC	CBS	NBC	Combined annual total
1983:	January	0	20	30	
	February	0	10	0	
	March	0	140	0	
	April	0	1,150	0	
	May	160	250	40	
	June	0	470	10	
	July	105	115	70	
	August	0	160	0	
	September	0	0	40	
	October	0	150	0	
	November	20	0	0	
	December	350	220	0	
	Total	635	2,685	190	3,510
1984:	January	10	0	10	
	February	0	0	0	
	March	0	0	0	
	April	200	140	30	
	May	150	170	190	
	June	0	140	390	
	July	0	210	100	
	August	190	0	50	
	September	0	0	0	
	October	0	0	230	
	November	0	600	20	
	December	820	670	760	
	Total	1,370	1,930	1,780	5,080
1985:	January	0	0	0	
	February	0	0	0	
	March	0	0	0	
	April	0	70	0	
	May	0	40	240	
	June	0	170	20	
	July	0	680	0	
	August	0	0	0	
	September	400	230	0	
	October	0	120	150	
	November	250	150	150	
	December	0	350	120	
	Total	650	1,810	680	3,140

TABLE 1. Seconds of Afghanistan 'Focus Story' Coverage, 1980-August 1987--Continued

Year/Month	ABC	CBS	NBC	Combined annual total
1986: January	0	30	40	
February	0	0	290	
March	0	800	140	
April	0	230	150	
May	170	230	0	
June	200	30	60	
July	0	200	150	
August	10	230	0	
September	0	30	170	
October	20	740	350	
November	0	0	10	
December	780	790	370	
Total	1,180	3,310	1,730	6,220
1987: January	870	340	250	
February	20	440	20	
March	30	430	0	
April	0	160	0	
May	100	0	0	
June	10	150	20	
July	0	220	0	
August	20	700	180	
Total	1,050	2,440	470	3,960
Eight-Year Totals	19,395	27,745	18,600	65,740

Source: Author's analysis of evening news program data in "Television News Index and Abstracts," published by Vanderbilt Television News Archive.

TABLE 2. Number of Afghanistan 'Focus Stories', by Month,
1980-August 1987

Year/Month		ABC	CBS	NBC	Combined annual total
1980:	January	36	37	31	
	February	22	22	19	
	March	13	3	6	
	April	3	2	3	
	May	5	3	3	
	June	11	12	9	
	July	2	3	4	
	August	1	1	0	
	September	5	2	2	
	October	1	2	5	
	November	1	2	1	
	December	3	3	3	
	Total	103	92	86	281
1981:	January	0	0	0	
	February	0	1	0	
	March	6	5	5	
	April	2	3	0	
	May	1	1	0	
	June	2	2	2	
	July	1	0	1	
	August	0	1	0	
	September	2	1	3	
	October	0	1	0	
	November	0	0	1	
	December	1	3	3	
	Total	15	18	15	48
1982:	January	1	1	0	
	February	2	0	0	
	March	4	2	3	
	April	0	0	0	
	May	0	0	0	
	June	0	0	0	
	July	0	0	0	
	August	0	0	0	
	September	0	1	0	
	October	0	0	0	
	November	3	2	2	
	December	4	4	2	
	Total	14	10	7	31

TABLE 2. Number of Afghanistan 'Focus Stories', by Month, 1980-August 1987--Continued

Year/Month	ABC	CBS	NBC	Combined annual total
1983: January	0	1	1	
February	0	1	0	
March	0	2	0	
April	0	3	0	
May	3	5	2	
June	0	2	1	
July	1	1	1	
August	0	2	0	
September	0	0	2	
October	0	1	0	
November	1	0	0	
December	1	1	0	
Total	6	19	7	32
1984: January	0	0	1	
February	0	0	0	
March	0	0	0	
April	2	1	1	
May	2	3	1	
June	0	1	2	
July	0	2	1	
August	1	0	2	
September	0	0	1	
October	0	0	2	
November	0	1	1	
December	4	3	3	
Total	9	11	15	35
1985: January	0	0	0	
February	0	0	0	
March	0	0	0	
April	0	2	0	
May	0	3	1	
June	0	1	1	
July	0	2	0	
August	0	0	0	
September	1	2	0	
October	0	2	1	
November	3	2	3	
December	0	4	1	
Total	4	18	7	29

TABLE 2. Number of Afghanistan Focus Stories', by Month, 1980-August 1987--Continued

Year/Month	ABC	CBS	NBC	Combined annual total
1986: January	0	1	1	
February	0	0	1	
March	0	3	1	
April	0	3	2	
May	2	3	0	
June	1	1	1	
July	0	2	2	
August	1	1	0	
September	0	1	1	
October	1	6	5	
November	0	0	1	
December	5	4	2	
Total	10	25	17	52
1987: January	8	5	2	
February	1	4	1	
March	2	6	0	
April	0	2	0	
May	1	0	0	
June	1	2	1	
July	0	1	0	
August	1	3	3	
Total	14	23	7	44
Eight-Year Total	175	216	161	552

Source: Author's analysis of evening news program data in "Television News Index and Abstracts," published by Vanderbilt Television News Archive.

TABLE 3. Number of Evening News Stories Mentioning Afghanistan, by Month, 1980-August 1987

Year/Month		ABC	CBS	NBC	Combined annual total
1980:	January	65	67	65	
	February	37	37	34	
	March	22	9	7	
	April	11	7	6	
	May	15	10	11	
	June	18	15	13	
	July	13	8	9	
	August	4	4	3	
	September	9	2	4	
	October	4	4	6	
	November	4	5	4	
	December	10	9	5	
	Total	212	177	167	556
1981:	January	2	4	2	
	February	7	6	4	
	March	9	9	7	
	April	4	8	4	
	May	6	4	4	
	June	7	3	3	
	July	3	1	3	
	August	2	1	1	
	September	7	4	8	
	October	0	1	0	
	November	0	3	2	
	December	1	5	5	
	Total	48	49	43	140
1982:	January	1	2	1	
	February	3	2	0	
	March	6	3	4	
	April	1	1	2	
	May	0	0	0	
	June	1	1	1	
	July	1	1	0	
	August	0	1	0	
	September	0	2	2	
	October	1	0	0	
	November	4	4	5	
	December	5	4	4	
	Total	23	21	19	63

TABLE 3. Number of Evening News Stories Mentioning Afghanistan,
1980-August 1987--Continued

Year/Month	ABC	CBS	NBC	Combined annual total
1983: January	0	1	1	
February	0	1	0	
March	0	2	1	
April	0	3	0	
May	5	6	3	
June	0	4	1	
July	1	1	1	
August	1	3	1	
September	1	0	2	
October	2	2	0	
November	7	1	1	
December	1	1	0	
Total	18	25	11	54
1984: January	1	1	1	
February	2	0	0	
March	0	0	1	
April	2	1	3	
May	4	8	5	
June	2	2	2	
July	3	3	2	
August	1	0	2	
September	0	0	3	
October	0	0	2	
November	0	2	2	
December	4	3	3	
Total	19	20	26	65
1985: January	0	1	0	
February	1	0	1	
March	0	0	2	
April	0	2	1	
May	0	4	1	
June	3	1	1	
July	0	4	0	
August	0	0	1	
September	1	3	0	
October	4	5	4	
November	10	7	7	
December	3	4	1	
Total	22	31	19	72